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The Atlantic Monthly

AUGUST 2000

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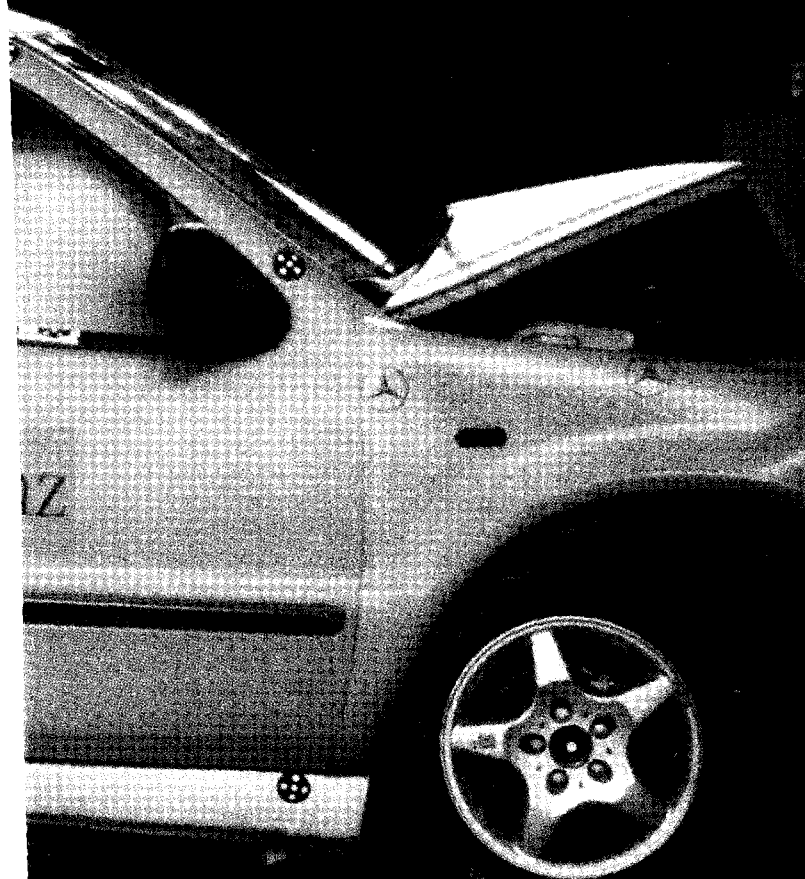


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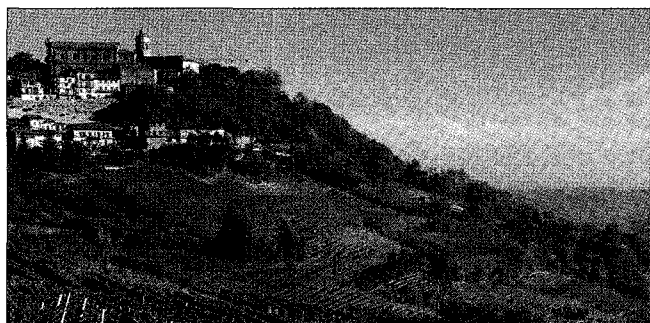
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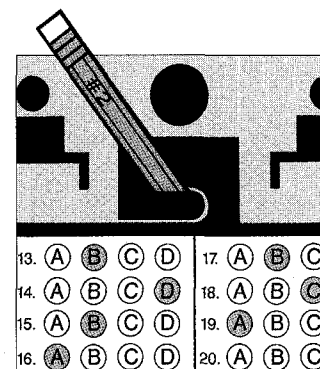
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PHOEBE-LOU Adams served on the staff of *The Atlantic Monthly* for more than half of the twentieth century, longer than anyone else with the exception of the ninth editor, Edward Weeks (to whom she was married for the last eighteen years of his life). She arrived, fresh from *The Hartford Courant*, in 1944, took up book reviewing in 1952, served for a while as our poetry editor, and has published in these pages reviews of some 4,000 volumes. Now she has decided to retire. Her last column, written in her eighty-first year, appears in this issue. Here is a random sampling of her fearless, impassioned opinions over the decades:

"This tempest in the academic teapot has to do with a loathsome instructor in a small 'progressive' college. . . . Miss McCarthy is a brilliant writer with a rare talent for corrosive satire, but in this novel her acid touch has become extreme acidosis" (*The Groves of Academe*, by Mary McCarthy).

"But nobody is perfect, and when the sage of Baltimore announces that 'poetry is essentially an effort to elude facts, whereas prose is essentially a means of unearthing and exhibiting them,' one can only murmur, Boobus Americanus" (*The American Scene*, by H. L. Mencken).



MARTIN CORNELL

"His point of view, when one has penetrated the linguistic brush pile, is tolerant exasperation with practically everything. At his best, Mr. Lennon can achieve overtones of satire, parody, obscenity, political comment, and literary reminiscence in a single cannily distorted word" (*A Spaniard in the Works*, by John Lennon).

"Reminds me of the time I worked in a mental hospital, where the worst of several available disasters was to be cornered by a patient—the kind put there merely because the family had become unendurably bored with his conversation—and compelled to listen to a life history told without humor, without discrimination, but with the absolute conviction that the speaker was the center of everybody's universe, and with total recall" (*La Bâtarde*, by Violette Leduc).

One of PLA's great admirers, a former book editor for *Time* magazine, who *knew* reviewers, pronounced her simply "a marvel." This marvel will be greatly missed, along with her interesting hats and the pungent smoke of cigarillos that tended to billow about her head and shoulders. We will just have to do without her saucy prose style, her passion for archaeology, her equable intolerance of nonsense. —THE EDITORS

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Francis Davis ("Charlie Haden, Bass") is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic*. He is at work on a biography of John Coltrane.

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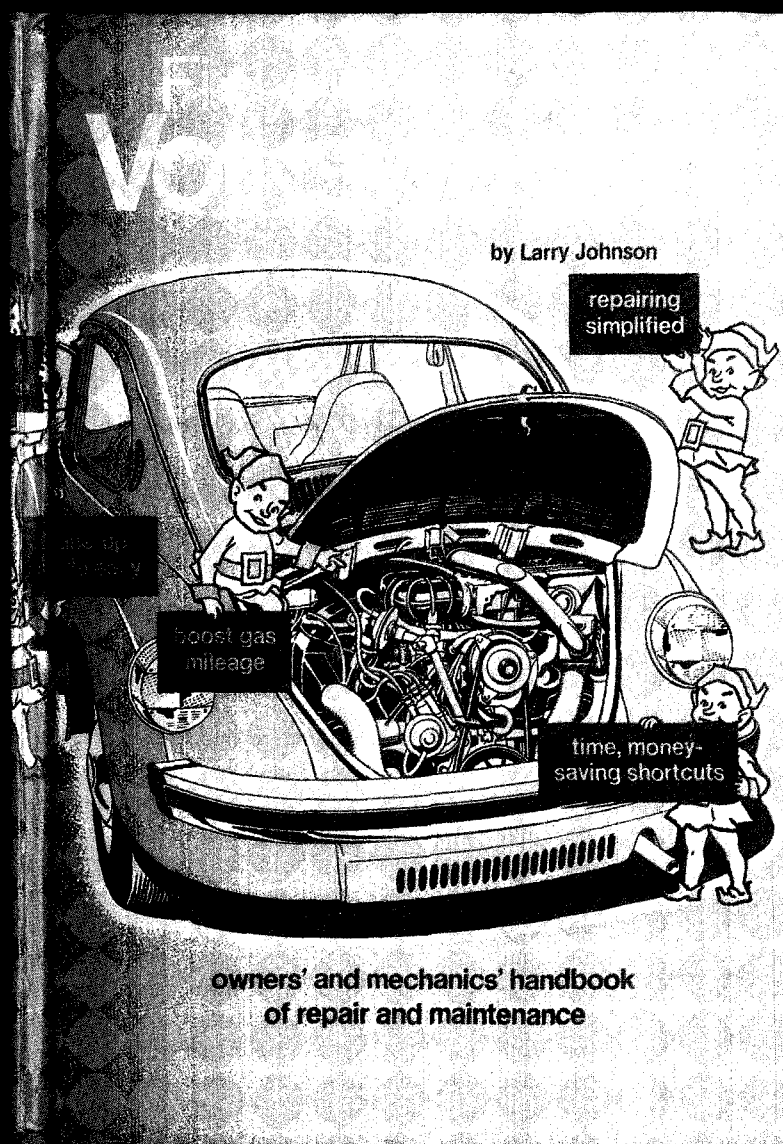
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LETTERS

The War Against Boys

Carol Gilligan et al. versus
Christina Hoff Sommers

Mail response to Christina Hoff Sommers's "The War Against Boys," in the May Atlantic, was swift and substantial. More than a hundred readers offered their opinions of the piece, including what appears to be an entire high school English class from Easton, Connecticut. Admirers of the article outnumbered critics, but by a small margin. What follows is a sample of the correspondence. It begins with a letter from Carol Gilligan, a particular object of Sommers's criticism

Contrary to Christina Hoff Sommers's claim that my research has not been subject to peer review, the findings of all the research studies referred to in *In a Different Voice* and the subsequent research with adolescent girls and women were published in refereed journals, including *Developmental Psychology*, the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Human Development*, and other leading journals in the field; in several volumes of *New Directions in Child Development*, edited by prominent researchers; and in five peer-reviewed books. Sommers says that she couldn't find out "how subjects were chosen, how interviews were recorded, and the method by which meaning was derived from the data"—all of which is clearly described in these publications and in monographs that explain the methodology for the studies so that other researchers can replicate them.

Sommers may be confused on this issue because her research assistants (identifying themselves only as students) asked not for published papers or monographs describing the research and methods but for the original data—meaning, in this case, verbatim transcripts of research interviews. We could not release these transcripts without violating legally and ethically binding agreements to protect the confidentiality of the people we interviewed. Because protecting the anonymity of people often demands more than simply changing their names,

my assistant and I have been working with the Henry A. Murray Research Center, at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, to develop a procedure by which scholars can examine transcripts of in-depth interviews while guaranteeing the privacy of those who participated in the research.

In focusing on questions of whether my research fits her model of standard practice, Sommers not only is inaccurate but also misses the larger point and finds controversy where none exists. The observation that boys are statistically more at risk than girls in early childhood, while girls are more likely to first show symptoms of psychological distress in adolescence, has been in the psychology literature for more than a hundred years and has been widely replicated. The absence of girls and women from major studies of psychological development is readily seen in the original publications, where researchers such as Piaget and Kohlberg clearly describe their use of all-male samples to form theories of moral development. The 1980 *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* criticized the omission of girls from studies of adolescence as a major problem in the field. Citing these facts and using the evidence of my research, I have identified new questions about development that reframe the discussion of differences and have offered a way to account for girls' greater resilience in childhood and the heightened vulnerability of young boys and adolescent girls.

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There are important unsettled issues in the study of both girls' and boys' development. The results of my research do not lend themselves to simple statements such as "Girls are thriving" and "Girls are at risk." Girls and boys are strong and vulnerable, although in somewhat different ways, and what we are to conclude about what this means for raising our children is a matter for discussion open to many points of view. It's sad that Sommers squanders the opportunity to open a constructive dialogue on our differences of opinion and interpretation and chooses instead to publish an inaccurate, *ad hominem* attack that can lead nowhere.

Carol Gilligan
Patricia Albjerg Graham Professor
of Gender Studies
Graduate School of Education
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Christina Hoff Sommers replies:

In Carol Gilligan's introduction to *In a Different Voice* she informs readers that her theses in that book are based on research done for three studies she calls "the college student study," "the abortion decision study," and "the rights and responsibilities study." These studies, she says, provide empirical support for her central and most intriguing claim: that women have a distinctive moral voice that expresses "an ethic of care and responsibility," rather than a characteristically male "ethic of justice and right." She has often been challenged to produce that research. Her letter now says that it is out there for anyone to see.

Readers will note, however, that she does not actually direct us to research supporting her hypothesis; instead she refers us to some journals, to volumes "edited by prominent researchers," and to "peer-reviewed books" where, she assures us, such research can be found. In fact it is nowhere to be found.

1. *Developmental Psychology*, "Moral Development and Reconstructive Memory: Recalling a Decision to Terminate an Unplanned Pregnancy," by Georgia Blackburn-Stover, Mary Field Belenky, and Carol Gilligan, 1982. In this small study (twenty-four women) subjects who were considering terminating a pregnancy were later queried about how they recollected this memorable event in their lives. The article, which was about how one's ethical maturity may affect one's memory of a critical event, reached no conclusions about

how men and women differ in making moral decisions (which may explain why it is never mentioned in *In a Different Voice*).

2. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, "Images of Violence in Thematic Apperception Test Stories," by Susan Pollak and Carol Gilligan, 1982. This study comes closest to being relevant to Gilligan's contention in *In a Different Voice*. It analyzes themes of violence in TAT stories and confirms that men's fantasies are more violent. But it does not directly address the question of male-female differences in moral reasoning or perceptions, nor does it arrive at any conclusions about different moral orientations.

3. *Human Development*, "Moral Development in Late Adolescence and Adulthood," by J. Murphy and Carol Gilligan, 1980. This article is a technical critique of Lawrence Kohlberg's stage theory and a defense of an alternative approach by W. Perry. It actually came to conclusions that contradict Gilligan's thesis: it found no significant statistical differences between men and women in moral orientation. The subjects studied were few in number. After several subjects dropped out, only twenty-one men and five women remained. In their conclusion Murphy and Gilligan acknowledged the negative results but explained them by saying "Failure to find significance [in sex differences] is at least partially due to the small number of subjects."

Why does Gilligan think of these articles as supporting her claims? I believe she considers them to be research for *In a Different Voice* because she used some of the interview transcripts as data for her three pilot studies. Using interviews and data from previous studies for a different study supporting new conclusions is an acceptable practice—but the new study must then be peer-reviewed to see whether the data do indeed help to make the case for the new contention. No such review has been attempted, so far as I know.

For more than fifteen years scholars in the fields of moral and developmental psychology have been rebuking Gilligan for the paucity of her research. In 1983 Mary Brabeck, a Boston College psychologist who is now BC's dean of education, succinctly stated the fatal weakness in relying on Gilligan's three unpublished studies: "No quantitative data are reported for any of these three studies. Evidence for Gilligan's theor[ies] . . . rests on quoted excerpts from interviews and her interpretations of these selected excerpts."

Three years later, in 1986, at a forum on Gilligan's work organized by the feminist journal *Signs*, several critics queried Gilligan about her missing evidence. She replied that her work was never intended to be taken as conventional data-based social science to prove an empirical generalization. "The argument [of my book]," she said, "was not statistical—that is, not based on the representativeness of the women studied or on the generality of the data presented to a larger population of women or men. Rather, the argument was interpretive and hinged on the demonstration that the examples presented illustrated a different way of seeing."

Five years later Susan Faludi quoted Gilligan as saying "I would never want to say this is an exhaustive group of people. [*In a Different Voice*] was a very small piece of work with three little pilot studies." Faludi observed that Gilligan "does not hold out her studies as scientific research efforts," seeing them rather as "interpretive." "Even so," Faludi said, "Gilligan doesn't give readers the basic data they do need to evaluate her case studies."

When I reviewed Gilligan's published work, I was persuaded that her critics were right. But I wanted access to those "three little pilot studies." My research assistant, Hugh Liebert, e-mailed Gilligan asking her where the studies could be found. Gilligan replied to Liebert through her assistant, Tatiana Bertsch, who wrote, "I am writing on behalf of Professor Gilligan. . . . None of the *In a Different Voice* studies have been published. . . . Sorry that none of what you are interested in is available."

Now, in an astonishing departure from previous explanations, Gilligan claims that "the findings of all the research studies referred to in *In a Different Voice* . . . were published in refereed journals." Moreover, she says that the published research does indeed satisfy the standard social-science protocols for soundly presented replicable research in support of the generalizations about sex differences for which she is famous. That claim cannot be credited.

In the final analysis, the (un)availability and (in)adequacy of Gilligan's research are the concern of her professional colleagues. My *Atlantic* article touched on *In a Different Voice* only because that is the book that made Gilligan famous and influential and because I firmly believe that her influence has been harmful—to boys especially, but to girls as well.

Gilligan went on to successfully pro-

mote the sensational but empirically baseless "finding" that America's adolescent girls were being "silenced" and demoralized as they were raised in our "male-voiced" culture, a culture that also harms boys by pressuring them "to internalize a patriarchal voice."

Gilligan's pronouncements on girls and boys are more ideological than scientific. Few academic psychologists take them seriously. In "gender studies" and in many schools of education, however, Gilligan is taken very seriously indeed, and not least because she is thought of as the famed Harvard scholar who did that "landmark research" showing that men and women speak morally in different voices.

In discussing the research undertaken by my late wife, Myra, and me, Christina Hoff Sommers implies that our work is not peer-reviewed. Worse, she claims that our research report "turns out to be missing." As thousands of students and scholars who use our studies know, the "missing" report, several doctoral dissertations, a score of articles in peer-reviewed journals, and several books are available through thousands of libraries in the United States and overseas. The report Sommers describes as "missing" is in fact part of the Educational Research and Information Clearinghouse, *Promoting Effectiveness in Classroom Instruction: Year 3 Final Report*, National Institute of Education, Washington, D.C. (call number ED 257819).

While ignoring the major findings of our study, and even the existence of the many other studies that document classroom bias, Sommers focuses on the gender call-out gap. We documented that teachers in the classroom allowed boys to call out answers but admonished girls who called out with reminders like "Raise your hand if you want to speak." Individual classrooms differ dramatically in the rate of the male call-out advantage. In our pilot study we found that boys called out eight times as often as girls. In our full study, which involved many more classrooms, we found a two-to-one male advantage. In the 1995 edition of *Failing at Fairness* we describe it this way: "Our research shows that boys call out significantly more often than girls" (p. 43). Sommers does not acknowledge the problem. In fact she comes out swinging, explaining that if teachers encourage boys to call out twice as often as girls, and then admonish girls who call out, that is no problem at all. That

might be Sommers's sense of instructional fairness; it is not mine.

Nor is Sommers disturbed by the gender gap in tests. She offers a partial description of the pool of SAT takers as a way of rationalizing the male advantage in the all-important testing world. In fact girls lag behind boys not only on the SAT but also on the PSAT, the SAT-II, and the ACT. On the Graduate Record Exam the male lead is 129 points (ETS, 1998). Although Sommers cites the fact that more girls are now taking the SAT Advanced Placement Exams, she omits the fact that boys are more likely to get the higher scores needed to gain college credit.

Sommers concludes, "The research commonly cited to support claims of male privilege and male sinfulness is riddled with errors. Almost none of it has been published in peer-reviewed professional journals." Three decades of well over a thousand peer-reviewed studies have documented the disturbing gender gap in schools. By attacking a few researchers, she hopes to taint, even ignore, the work of many.

Beginning in the early 1970s my wife and I consistently wrote about sexism as a "double-edged sword" and called for schools to respond to the very real needs of both boys and girls. Despite Sommers's charges that researchers like me are making a case for "male sinfulness," that phrase is not part of our research lexicon. In her first co-authored book, *Sexism in School and Society* (1973), Myra included powerful statistics on how bias affects boys, and offered recommendations for creating fairer schools. I wrote one of the first curricula ever designed to help teachers work with boys to counter the limiting impact of the male stereotype (*To Be a Man*, 1976). Chapter Eight of *Failing at Fairness* is titled "The Miseducation of Boys." Although it may serve a political purpose to cast our work as "boys against girls," the truth is that Myra and I dedicated our professional lives to battling sexist assumptions that wound both our daughters and our sons. It is bias we oppose, not boys.

David Sadker
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Although Christina Hoff Sommers complains that Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking book *In a Different Voice* devotes only one brief paragraph to the mechanics of the foundational "rights and

responsibilities study," this is not the case. Chapter Two lays out the purpose of the study, the basis for selecting the sample, the moral dilemma that was presented to the participants, and the sequence of the interviews. Similarly, Sommers's persistent claim that this and other studies were never published in peer-reviewed journals is simply wrong. The "college student study" appeared in *Human Development*, the "abortion study" in *Developmental Psychology*, and the "rights and responsibilities study" in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*.

Sommers's accusations that Gilligan never used "conventional protocols of social-science research" and that her published research "consists of anecdotes based on a small number of interviews" betray a startling ignorance of research methodology. A quick glance through *Child Development* or any other peer-reviewed journal will reveal that smaller samples are perfectly acceptable (indeed, the norm) for more-intensive analyses and that qualitative approaches like Gilligan's are common practice. In fact, a detailed account of Gilligan's methodology is documented in several peer-reviewed publications, including Brown and Gilligan's *Meeting at the Crossroads*, and this is the method of choice for many social scientists.

Jean E. Rhodes

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Cambridge, Mass.

Perhaps the most serious flaw in Christina Hoff Sommers's "The War Against Boys" is its *ex post facto* perspective, using current conditions to discredit research completed nearly ten years ago. The research conducted by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation in 1991 and 1992 cited by Sommers focused on shortcomings in the nation's classrooms. Among many other things, it included recommendations to engage girls' interest in—and access to—mathematics, science, and school sports.

The problems were real and the solutions appropriate; today girls are pursuing more-challenging math and science classes. Instead of celebrating these achievements, Sommers imagines a battle between the sexes, a zero-sum game in which success for girls comes at the expense of boys. This spurious cause-and-effect rea-

soning is not supported by empirical evidence or by common sense. Are we to believe that the educational outcomes for African-American males, for example, which have everything to do with urban poverty, are related to the presence of summer science camps for girls in the 1990s or to efforts to broaden girls' access to competitive sports?

Sommers does not acknowledge the findings concerning boys that were included in the 1992 report. *How Schools Shortchange Girls* reported that boys face higher dropout rates, outnumber girls by "startling percentages" in special-education programs, underperform girls in reading on national tests, and, among socioeconomically low students, are more likely than girls to repeat a grade. In 1998 the AAUW Educational Foundation released an update of the 1992 report. The update, *Gender Gaps*, featured as its most prominent finding girls' progress, and parity, in mathematics and science course taking, and noted areas of continuing concern, including a gender gap in computer science and technology. We invite readers to return to the 1992 report and to form their own opinions as to its relevance and stature. We are confident that they will find the work less tendentious than Sommers's article would have them believe.

Similarly, studies cited as refutations of the AAUW Educational Foundation's research are, in key respects, inappropriate for comparison. Judith Kleinfeld's review, for example, commits the obvious error of using data from 1996 and other recent years to denounce findings from a report published in 1992 and based largely on 1980s data.

Finally, Sommers criticizes a *New York Times* reporter for not searching out an opposing viewpoint, yet she herself made no effort to contact the AAUW or the AAUW Educational Foundation to obtain a current response to her outdated arguments. Had she called, she would have learned that months ago the foundation organized a "beyond the (so-called) gender wars" research symposium for the fall. The foundation will convene prominent scholars who have conducted original research on boys' and girls' experiences in and out of school, to share insights and to identify common ground and concerns that emerge from this cumulative body of work. After a decade of research there are many areas where scholars who have

looked at all sides of gender and education can come together to improve schooling for all children.

Sharon Schuster

President, AAUW Educational Foundation

Sandy Bernard

President, AAUW
Washington, D.C.

Until I read "The War Against Boys," I had thought maybe I was the only American observing how educators of both sexes are radically feminizing our schools. Sommers marshals an impressive array of supporting evidence, in contrast to the weak evidence cited by those who manufactured the "crisis" of diminished girls. I would add two more citations.

Since the 1970s Deborah Tannen has established that boys and men use everyday conversation to create a stratified pecking order and to establish their place in it, while girls and women use language to replace that pecking order with a community of equals.

And since the 1960s Mary N. Meeker has established that girls' brains are generally stronger in verbal abilities than are boys' brains.

It's beyond me to say whether the male's weaker verbal abilities induce boys and men to prefer conflict to community or, likewise, the female's stronger verbal abilities induce girls and women to prefer community to conflict. But surely Sommers, Tannen, Meeker, and others have established that there is a human blueprint for maleness, and that educators should take advantage of it, not feminize it.

Richard Tracey

Carlsbad, Calif.

I was disappointed to find Christina Hoff Sommers using the same sort of poorly thought through and inadequately supported arguments that she deplores in Carol Gilligan's work on the treatment of girls in school in order to knock down Gilligan's conclusion that boys would benefit if they were permitted a longer period of attachment to their mothers. I was particularly dismayed by her uncritical acceptance of the assertion, by Daniel Patrick Moynihan and others, that it is the lack of a male role model (and, by implication, the presence of too much mothering) that is responsible for the statistical link between the experience of growing up in a single-parent family and the incidence of violent behavior in boys and young men.

As Sommers takes care to point out and then ignores, the existence of a statistical correlation may suggest there is something to investigate, but it hardly establishes cause. The data certainly do not prove that mothers who are alone cannot raise sons with good values. After all, throughout most of our cultural history the widow's son has been not the villain of the fairy tale but the hero. Nor were the boys raised by women who lost their husbands in World War II notorious for their poor behavior. That distinction was, as I remember, reserved for preachers' sons.

If there is one cause-and-effect that is established as thoroughly as is possible in this dicey field, it is that children who have been abused and neglected are more likely than other children to become violent as they grow older. I believe that Sommers and the experts she cites are wrong. It is not the absence of a male role model that produces violence in the male offspring of the single-parent family. It is that the models they had before the parent became single were bad.

Sara Dustin
Hopkinton, N.H.

Since I am identified as the source of misinformation about the publication and availability of Professor Gilligan's research, and my e-mail to the Harvard undergraduate Hugh Liebert was published without my knowledge or permission, I am writing to set the record straight and to clarify the meaning of my e-mail.

Contrary to the impression created by Christina Hoff Sommers's quotation of my e-mail to Liebert, in which I said "None of the *In a Different Voice* studies have been published. . . . none of what you are interested in is available," the studies have been published and the data are available. Liebert and I had multiple conversations prior to this e-mail correspondence in which we established the word "studies" to mean the verbatim interview transcripts. Since the only specific request that I could discern was for the unpublished data, I assumed that he had already familiarized himself with Professor Gilligan's published work. Indeed, a quick review of the literature would have revealed that the work has been published. For example, the results from the rights and responsibilities study were published in 1988 in "Two Moral Ori-

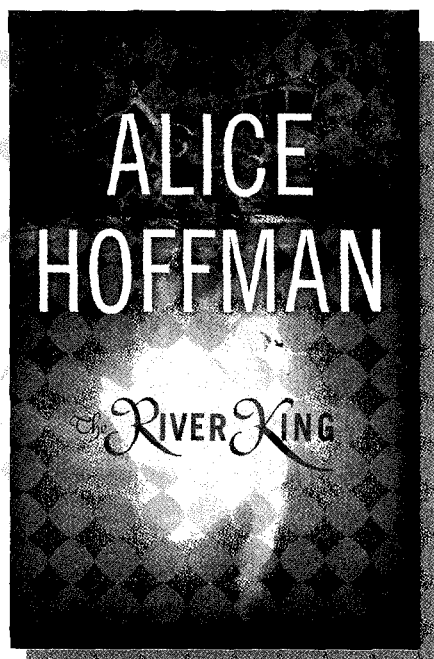
entations: Gender Differences and Similarities," by C. Gilligan and J. Attanucci, *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 34 (3), 223-237. The research and design of the abortion study are described in detail in both *In a Different Voice* and *Developmental Psychology*, 18 (6), 862-870: "Moral Development and Reconstructive Memory: Recalling a Decision to Terminate an Unplanned Pregnancy." Since Liebert was asking specifically about the raw data, and it is not common practice to publish thousands of pages of raw interview transcripts, I told him that the verbatim transcripts were not published. When the word "studies" in my e-mail to Liebert is read to mean verbatim interview transcripts, my statement is accurate. When Sommers portrays it to mean protocol, method, research design, or results, I am egregiously misunderstood.

The interview data from these studies and from the college-student study have been available to graduate students and scholars over the years. Before I bring specific requests to Professor Gilligan, I gather basic information regarding the nature, scope, and time frame of the proposed research. Because I was unable to get a clear response

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from Liebert (he never said that he was conducting research for a book, nor did he say he worked with or for Sommers), other than a vague request regarding the procurement of the raw data for an unspecified project, I did not bring this request to Professor Gilligan's attention. Had *The Atlantic* or Sommers called me, I would have clarified that the e-mail was part of a larger conversation regarding Liebert's request.

Tatiana Bertsch
Graduate School of Education
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

Christina Hoff Sommers replies:

David Sadker says he has published "a score of [research] articles in peer-reviewed journals" on classroom bias. But the one source he cites is a report called *Promoting Effectiveness in Classroom Instruction: Year 3 Final Report*. Such reports are not peer-reviewed and not published—just filed with the government as an earnest of work performed for an awarded grant. In any case, that government report does not contain the famous missing study about call-outs that I discussed in my article. In their book *Failing at Fairness* the Sadkers wrote, "Our research shows that boys call out eight times more often than girls. . . . However, when girls call out, . . . the teacher remembers the rule about raising your hand. . . . And then the girl . . . is deftly and swiftly put in her place."

The eight-to-one "call-out gap" became a favorite with journalists and politicians who saw in it a persuasive manifestation of a pervasive gender bias in our nation's schools. *The New York Times* alone has credited it on three separate occasions. But what evidence is there that it exists?

The Sadkers gave different answers over time, but they never produced the original research. When a reporter from *U.S. News & World Report* inquired about the research, David Sadker told her that he had presented the findings in an unpublished paper at a conference, and that he no longer had a copy. Now, in his *Atlantic* letter, he says it was in an unspecified "pilot study" that was superseded by another (also unspecified) "full study." Meanwhile, in a revised version of *Failing at Fairness* the eightfold claim has been reduced to "boys call out significantly more than girls."

The American Association of University Women is the group that successfully propagated the myth of the shortchanged girl. To question this myth is to risk de-

nunciation. The Spring, 1997, newsletter *AAUW Outlook*, for example, explicitly compared me and other "gender bias revisionists" to those who deny the Holocaust. The response to the *Atlantic* article is less acrimonious but scarcely more reasonable.

Sharon Schuster and Sandy Bernard now say that boys' weaknesses were fully acknowledged in the AAUW research. They note, for example, that boys' reading deficits were discussed in *How Schools Shortchange Girls*. But when boys' deficiencies are mentioned, they are immediately discounted.

In all age groups, girls have consistently received higher test scores in reading and writing since the 1970s. Since 1971, however, boys have made gains relative to girls, particularly in the seventeen-year-old-group. . . . It has been suggested that even if the small gender difference favoring girls [in reading] is *statistically significant*, it may not be *educationally significant*. [Emphasis in original.]

It is in fact not true that boys have made gains relative to girls since 1971. According to the Department of Education, what was true in 1971 is still true today: the average seventeen-year-old boy reads at the level of a typical fifteen-and-a-half-year-old girl. As for writing, the department reports, "male 11th graders scor[e] at about the same level as female 8th graders in 1996."

The AAUW may not regard the reading-and-writing gap as "educationally significant," but it adversely affects the futures of millions of low-achieving boys.

Now, faced with charges of systematic unfairness to boys, the AAUW talks ecumenically about "improv[ing] schooling for all children." Unfortunately, the organization's attitude toward boys has not changed—and perhaps cannot change.

Indeed, a very recent fundraising letter from the AAUW opens with anonymous quotations from distressed girls: "I kept my hand up for a full five minutes . . . and he never called on me!" "Boys will grab whatever they want to." The AAUW is still broadcasting its divisive boy-blighting message: "We can't continue to shortchange more than one half of our population—one half of our future."

Jean Rhodes, the director of gender studies at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, would assure us that Carol Gilligan actually published the three studies. She says, for example, that the "rights and responsibilities study" appeared in the *American*

Journal of Orthopsychiatry. But Rhodes is mistaken. *In a Different Voice* describes the rights and responsibilities study as a study of 144 male and female adult subjects. The article in the *Journal of Orthopsychiatry* discusses comments made by four children; it contains no data and very little, if anything, in the way of research.

Tatiana Bertsch, on the other hand, asserts that the "rights and responsibilities study" was published as a 1988 article in the *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*. However, that little article, which Gilligan herself does not cite in her list, reports some highly equivocal findings made six years *after* the publication of *In a Different Voice* (1982); it cannot possibly be the research to which Gilligan had referred in the book. Note, too, that Bertsch says that "results" of the rights and responsibilities study were published, not the actual study. That study, as Bertsch told Liebert, has not been published.

Bertsch now asks us to read "study" to mean "raw data." Two of my assistants spoke with Bertsch, and whatever her impression may be, neither ever asked her for "raw data" or for "verbatim interview transcripts." We wanted to know only one thing: are the three studies for *In a Different Voice* in the public domain? In her e-mail to Liebert, Bertsch was admirably clear and concise, informing him that the studies had not yet been published and were unavailable.

Oral History

I have one small cavil about Douglas L. Wilson's otherwise excellent piece ("Keeping Lincoln's Secrets," May *Atlantic*) on William H. Herndon. Wilson writes that Herndon "was conducting the first oral history of a great American hero." This does an injustice to James Parton.

Setting to work a dozen years after the death of Andrew Jackson, Parton read everything written on Jackson and could not make up his mind about him. In his perplexity Parton resorted to oral history. "In Washington I conversed with politicians of the last generation, who have no longer an interest in concealing the truth," he wrote. He visited a third of the states to hear the recollections of men and women who had known Jackson and had supported or opposed him. "Thus it was that contradictions were reconciled, that mysteries were revealed, and that the truth was made apparent." Parton's memorable

three-volume biography of Jackson came out in 1859–1960, while Herndon was still collecting material on Lincoln.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr.
New York, N.Y.

The photograph on page 86 of the May, 2000, issue shows William Herndon's crepe-draped law office in the spring of 1865—not in 1860, as stated in the caption. The motto above the windows ("He Lives in the Hearts of His People") is not a campaign slogan; it is a lament for the assassinated President, a former partner in the firm of Lincoln & Herndon.

Hank Burchard
Arlington, Va.

What JFK Really Said

We were bemused (though also wryly gratified) to see in your May issue an article by Sheldon M. Stern ("What JFK Really Said") alleging seventeen transcription errors in our 1997 book, *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis*, which published nearly 200,000 words of transcriptions.

Bemused for two reasons. First, the preface of our book explained that most of the taped conversations are very hard to understand. (Some people who were present at the meetings have listened to tapes and confessed that they could scarcely make out a single word.) "The reader has here the best text we can produce," we wrote, "but it is certainly not perfect. We hope that some, perhaps many, will go to the original tapes. If they find an error or make out something we could not, we will enter the corrections and enhancements in subsequent printings of this volume." As Stern acknowledges, we did just that in printings after the first. We personally invited Stern to suggest corrections when the three of us appeared together on a panel at the Kennedy Library in 1997. Yet we never heard a word from him.

Second, as has been widely publicized for more than a year, we have gone back over all the tapes and are still going over them with new colleagues and far better technology. A three-volume reference set with transcriptions of all Kennedy tapes for three months of 1962 is being published by W. W. Norton early next year, the product of the Presidential Recordings Project at the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs. These volumes will include

the retranscribed missile-crisis records and much, much more (the Mississippi civil-rights crisis, Berlin, tax cuts, and so on), including tapes of telephone conversations which were discovered and made public property only in 1998. Stern mentions none of this. We had also expected (and announced) that the Harvard University Press would issue an entirely revised *Kennedy Tapes* paperback this coming fall, but Harvard's editors disappointed us by deciding that the amendments and additions were not significant enough to justify the cost of scrapping and replacing the existing stock.

Our wry gratification also has two sources. First, with only two exceptions (Kennedy's saying "final failure" in one sentence instead of "prime failure," and one of his aides' referring to former President Eisenhower offering his opinion to doubting congressmen as a "soldier" instead of a "facilitator"), we had already made the corrections that Stern suggests, either in subsequent printings or for the forthcoming volumes, and we are not finished with them yet. In a few cases our corrections surpass, or correct, his. Indeed, we have made hundreds of other small corrections, have been able to make out a good deal of what was said in passages we had labeled "unclear," and have identified speakers with much greater precision.

Second, none of these amendments are very important. None of them change what a reader of the transcripts takes away concerning the essence or even the minute details of the deliberations that took place in the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room in those terrifying thirteen days of October, 1962.

Finally, we offer a historical perspective. Partial transcriptions for a few missile-crisis meetings were first published in 1983, while Stern was working at the Kennedy Library. Then the National Archives abandoned such efforts as being too costly and interpretive. For fourteen years historians relied on those few initial transcripts. They were right to rely on them, because the people who did that work were conscientious and did the best they could. Though our book significantly improved on those transcripts and transcribed the rest of the meetings, we did not criticize the earlier efforts. We built on them and tried to make them better. We published our book in 1997 because we were eager to offer a fuller portrait of the crisis, and of how Kennedy performed. These revelations and transcriptions have already had a major impact on scholarship, offering a more positive pic-

ture of President Kennedy, clarifying what he thought the crisis was about, and illuminating the debates.

Transcriptions are subjective interpretations of the true historical record, the tapes themselves. We're sure that people will keep arguing with this or that rendition of a passage. But the tapes are effectively inaccessible without transcriptions. To bring these treasures to the public, someone must go out on a limb and craft hundreds—thousands—of pages of transcriptions. So we keep working.

Ernest R. May
Cambridge, Mass.
Philip D. Zelikow
Charlottesville, Va.

Sheldon Stern replies:

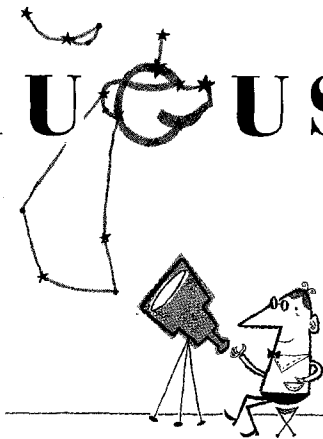
Ernest May and Philip Zelikow claim to be "bemused" and "wryly gratified" that I found only seventeen errors in 200,000 words of transcriptions. Plainly, the length of my article permitted only a tiny sampling of errors. The October 18 transcript alone was so flawed that I stopped penciling in corrections and wrote my own transcript. After finding dozens of errors in just the first twenty pages, I spot-checked the other transcripts, with similar results.

May and Zelikow claim that "in a few cases our corrections surpass, or correct" mine. I made clear in the article that revision is a continuing process. I have listened to the tapes again in the six cases in which they claim to have corrected my transcriptions: in four instances I stand by my version; in one case I am less sure; only once, involving one word, are they clearly right.

Perhaps the real purpose of their letter is to divert attention from these errors (suggested by the fact that corrections made in the fourth printing were slipped in without scholarly documentation). My goal as a historian and an educator is not to collaborate with this smokescreen but to inform readers, particularly the history teachers I have urged to use the transcripts in their classrooms.

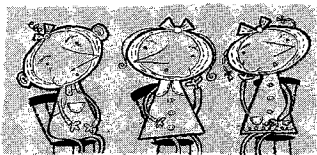
The assertion, by reputable scholars, that "none of these amendments is very important" is shocking. When the words are wrong, as they are repeatedly, the historical record is wrong. The claim that the transcripts were as good as they could have been, given the technical quality of the tapes, is an affront to thousands of scholars, general readers, schools, and libraries that bought *The Kennedy Tapes* assuming they would get the best from the brightest.

THE AUGUST ALMANAC



Health & Safety

Alternative medicine takes another step toward the mainstream this month, as clinical licensing exams in naturopathic medicine—a discipline that emphasizes prevention and avoids pharmaceutical drugs—begin to be administered by the newly formed North American Board of Naturopathic Examiners. The board will also be responsible for determining who is eligible to take the exams and for sending the results to the jurisdictions where the candidates hope to be licensed. Previously these duties were assumed by the exam's producers. With the restructuring, the exam and the licensing process now follow the model used by many other health-care professionals, including physicians and chiropractors. A growing acceptance of naturopathy is reflected in recent decisions by some health-care plans to cover naturopathic treatment.



Demographics

Dentists' waiting rooms may be unusually crowded this month: August is the peak time for dental visits, largely because of back-to-school checkups. Emergency visits to pediatric dentists are said to spike twice a year: after Halloween (owing to candy-related toothaches and injuries), and in early summer (when rough outdoor play often results in tooth injuries). In spite of an increase in preventive measures, four out of five children wind up with at least one cavity by age 17, and some of them have considerably more: 25 percent of children account for 80 percent of all childhood cavities. The misery involved, at least, should start to lessen: in 1997 the Food and Drug Administration approved the dental use of laser tools, which can repair cavities virtually without pain.

The Skies

August 10: This evening the constellation Sagittarius, which is actually shaped like a teapot even though it is named for an archer, lies below the waxing Moon. During the second half of the month, when the Moon sets early, a thick star cloud—the center of the Milky Way—can be seen, in the words of one observer, “like a puff of steam just above the Teapot’s spout.”

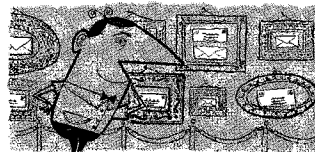
15: Full Moon, also known this month as the Green Corn Moon and the Sturgeon Moon. **21–22:** Jupiter, Saturn, and the waning Moon rise together in a line in the east around midnight.

Q&A

Why do songs get stuck so persistently in our heads?

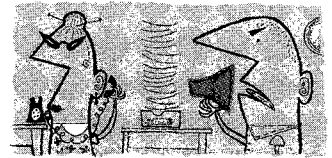
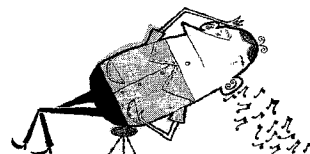
Paradoxically, the annoyance we feel when we realize we have been humming, say, “If I Only Had a Brain” for three days on end is exactly why we hum it in the first place. Daniel Wegner, a psychologist and the author of *White Bears and Other Unwanted Thoughts*, has coined the phrase “the ironic process” to describe the psychological mechanism that is responsible. The mind searches, consciously and unconsciously, for undesirable thoughts so that it can avoid them, much the way that a ship uses sonar to avoid rocks. However, this activity tends to foster those very thoughts. The phenomenon has been tested many times in the laboratory. For example, researchers have shown that people who are trying not to think about sex experience

the same physiological response as those who are trying to think about sex. According to Wegner, the best way to rid yourself of oppressive tunes is, well, to face the music: hum or sing the song repeatedly. Herewith an exercise: “I would not be just a nuffin’ / My head all full of stuffin’ / My heart all full of pain / I would dance and be merry / Life would be a ding-a-derry / If I only had a brain.”



Arts & Letters

August 22: The most extensive exhibit ever of the papers of the expatriate American writer, composer, and translator Paul Bowles opens today at the University of Delaware Library. “Paul Bowles: 1910–1999” will include troves of material taken from more than 50 boxes of papers that Bowles transferred to the library shortly before his death, last November. Born to a middle-class family on Long Island, Bowles settled in Tangier in 1947. He wrote 11 short-story collections and four novels, among them *The Sheltering Sky*, and composed numerous pieces for ballet, opera, film, and plays. His translation of Sartre’s *No Exit*—a title Bowles came up with—became the standard text for English-language productions. Bowles’s friends included Aaron Copland, Tennessee Williams, Orson Welles, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Truman Capote. The show will contain collaborations and correspondence with them, along with photographs, artwork, travel diaries, and recordings Bowles made of rare Berber folk music. It will run through December; all of the new material will be available to researchers this fall.

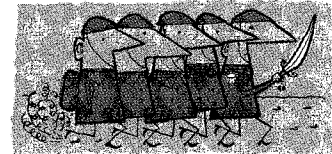


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100 Years Ago

Arthur Twining Hadley, writing in the August, 1900, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: “If a large number of people want a thing, we not infrequently hear it said that there is a public sentiment in its favor. It would be much more correct to say that there is a widespread personal interest in securing it. The term public sentiment can only be applied to those feelings and demands which people are willing to enforce at their own cost, as well as at that of others. The desire for better municipal government on the part of the man who is not willing to labor for that end, the effusive patriotism of the man who hopes thereby to lead other people to enter upon a war of which he may celebrate the glories and enjoy the fruits, the denunciation of trusts by the man who has tried to do what they do and has not succeeded, can never be regarded as expressions of public sentiment in any true sense. They are but instances of the selfishness, the vaingloriousness, and even the envy of large sections of the community.”





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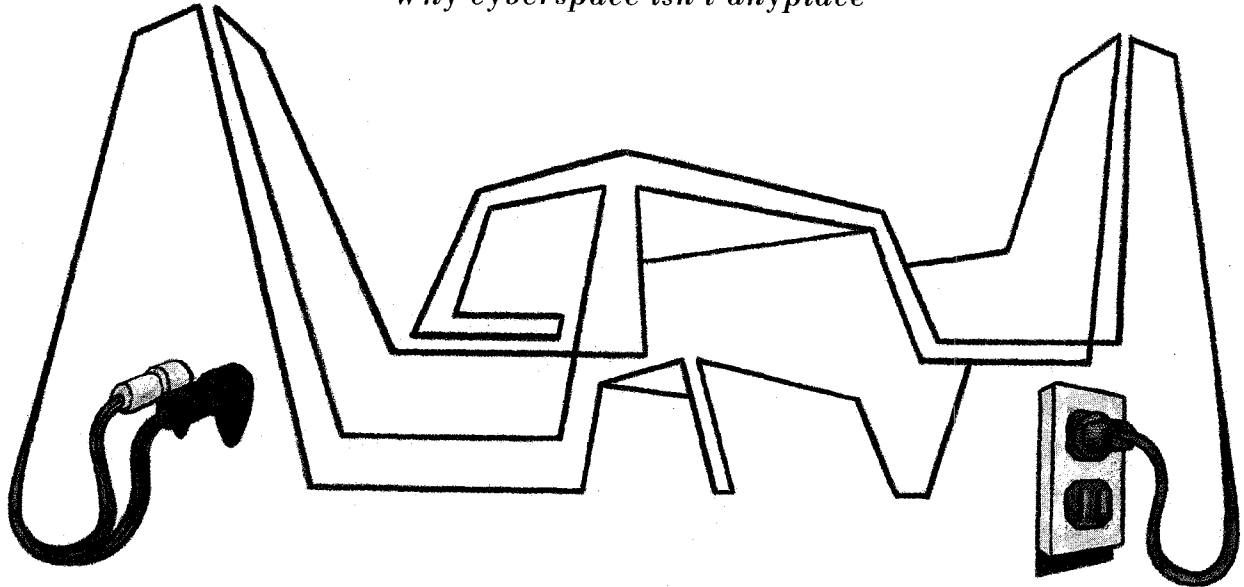
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No "There" There

Why cyberspace isn't anyplace



I'M a pretty Net-savvy guy. I read my morning newspaper online. I buy discount airline tickets online. I participate in animated sports banter online. I even manage my finances online (if transferring money to cover checks qualifies as "managing my finances"). Still, I have never been to the magical land called cyberspace.

Cyberspace isn't on any map, but I know that it must exist, because it is spoken of every day. People spend hours in *chat rooms*. They visit *Web sites*. They travel through this electronic domain on an *information superhighway*. The language we use implies that cyberspace is a place as tangible as France or St. Louis or the coffee shop on the corner. But why, exactly, should we think of the Internet as a geographic location? I recently participated in a telephone conference call with people in several other states and countries. Were we all together in another "place"? I doubt that any of us thought so.

Many would say that it isn't just the act of communicating that makes cyberspace a place but the existence of a community consisting of broadly dispersed people. But that characteristic is not particularly distinctive. There are communities big and small that do not exist within any physical jurisdiction. Professional associations, alumni groups, and religious orders are among them. Members of such groups feel a kinship with other members with whom they have never interacted, in either the real or the virtual sense.

Some would respond, "Those people all had something in common before they forged connections across boundaries.

But cyberspace communities were created online. There were no prior affinities to bring them together. That's unique." Is it? Ham radio operators have a global network of friends and acquaintances who came together solely through their use of that instrument. Do they exist in "hamspace"? And why is the manner in which people make first contact so significant? Do pen pals exist in "penpalspace"?

One reason that cyberspace is described as a place is to avoid downgrading it to the status of a mere medium, and perhaps especially to avoid comparisons with television. Those who would distinguish the Internet from television point out that Web denizens are not mere passive recipients of electronic signals. That may be (partly) true. But telephones and the postal system are also communications media that allow two-way communication. We don't regard them as places.

Thinking of the Internet as a place certainly makes it seem more intriguing. The idea of logging on and entering another space is suggestive in all sorts of ways. It raises issues of consciousness, allows us to think of ourselves as disembodied cybernauts, and sets us apart not just from our primitive ancestors but also from our recent ones. Not incidentally, representing the home computer and AOL membership as a gateway to another dimension helps to sell home computers and AOL memberships. The various Web sites, IPOs, and dot-coms-of-the-day feed on the fervor surrounding our exploration of this strange new land. By morphing the Internet into a destination, cyberspace has become the Klondike of our age. (Cu-

by Jonathan G. S. Koppell

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Liz Tait, Karma Specialist, believes just about everything is destined to have another life, or two, or three.

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riously, Seattle is reaping the benefits this time around, too.)

Metaphors matter: they can help to shape our views and actions. Consider the widespread acceptance of the term “marketplace of ideas” as a metaphor for free speech. This representation emphasizes one’s freedom to enter the arena of discourse, rather than one’s ability to be heard. Thus, in the context of campaign-finance regulation, protection of free speech means that unlimited campaign expenditures are sacrosanct, but guaranteeing equal opportunities to reach the electorate is not a consideration. If, in contrast, we imagined not a marketplace but a classroom, enabling the quietest voice to be heard would be more important than protecting the rights of the loudest. Another example is the ill-fated “war on drugs.” By conceiving of drugs as an enemy to be defeated in combat, we blind ourselves to many potential solutions. In the context of war the legalization of drugs amounts to capitulation to the enemy—even if it might address many of the problems, such as crime, disease, and chronic poverty, that were used to justify the war in the first place.

For its part, the cyberspace-as-place metaphor raises issues of logic and psychology that may ultimately impede wise management of the Internet. Lawrence Lessig, of Harvard Law School, argues in his book *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (1999) that the government should not sit by while private code (software) writers define the nature of the Internet. Such a seemingly neutral stance, Lessig says, is not neutral but irresponsible. In the case of cyberspace, laissez-faire government simply defers decision-making authority to profit-seeking companies. Guided only by commercial interests, the development of the Internet is skewed to favor the corporation rather than the individual or society as a whole.

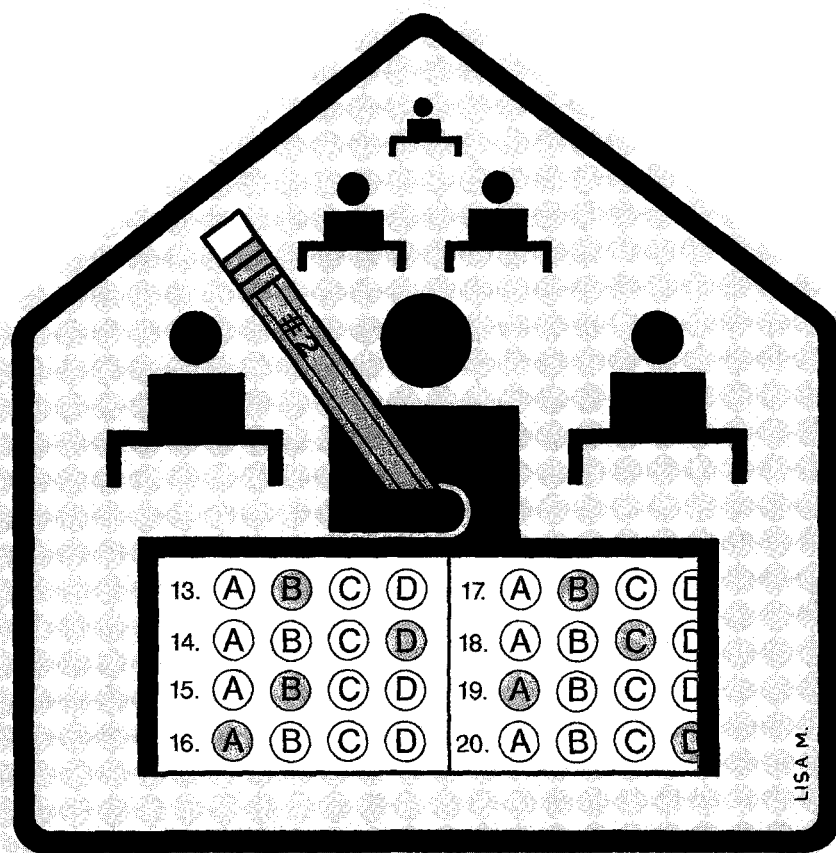
The problem, Lessig explains, is that legislatures and courts are reluctant to regulate the Internet. He lays out some compelling reasons why this is so, but he skips a crucial one. Because we think of the Internet as a place, the prospect of “going there” takes on an extra dimension. Legislatures are wary of bringing government to cyberspace—as if it somehow existed in some pure state beyond ordinary society. Judges are reluctant to bring law into this “new” arena, as if applying existing

laws to Internet transactions would be tantamount to colonizing Antarctica or the moon. In the context of legal discussions, cyberspace is seen not as a potentially anarchic realm but as a virginal Eden; the introduction of law would not so much bring order as corrupt utopia. Republicans in Congress have vowed to “stand at the door to the Internet” to defend its sanctity. Their “E-Contract 2000” would, for example, prohibit sales taxes in cyberspace for at least five years—as if such a moratorium were needed to nurture the most dynamic sector of the economy. Many Democrats, equally eager to win favor in the industry, also support the concept of an online duty-free “zone.”

As it happens, Lessig himself reinforces cyberspace-as-place thinking. He argues that the Internet user exists simultaneously in two “places,” a physical location and cyberspace—thus making the application of law somewhat difficult. In reality, the problems created by Internet transactions simply involve making decisions about jurisdiction. Should a criminal computer user, for example, be subject to the laws of the state in which he resides, or to the laws of the state in which the victim resides? This can be a knotty question, but it is not a new problem—not a “cyberspace problem.” Such determinations are made every day with respect to telephone and postal transactions. Are these problems more common because of the Internet? Yes. Do they involve more jurisdictions because of the Internet? Yes. But they do not involve their own jurisdiction, any more than matters initiated or conducted through the mails involve “postalspace.”

That is not to say that the Internet will have no consequences for governance. The growth of the Internet may gradually shift the locus of authority upward, from local and state governments to the federal government or even international institutions, because as human interactions transcend political boundaries, only governments with broad jurisdictions will be able to monitor certain kinds of behavior and enforce certain kinds of laws. Law and government will adapt accordingly.

The cyberspace-as-place metaphor is probably here to stay. And it has its uses, as do the many other fanciful metaphors we use in everyday speech. But let’s not be misled. The regulation of cyberspace—in areas from copyright to taxation to privacy—hardly represents the spoliation of a pristine and untamed land. ☼



“High Stakes Are for Tomatoes”

*Statewide testing of students, with penalties
for failure, has run into opposition from parents
across the political spectrum*

BY now it's hardly news that as education has risen to the top of the national agenda, a great wave—some would say a frenzy—of school reform has focused on two related objectives: more-stringent academic standards and increasingly rigorous accountability for both students and schools.

In state after state, legislatures, governors, and state boards, supported by business leaders, have imposed tougher requirements in math, English, science, and

other fields, together with new tests by which the performance of both students and schools is to be judged. In some places students have already been denied diplomas or held back in grade if they failed these tests. In some states

and principals' salaries—and in some, such as Virginia, the accreditation of schools—will depend on how well students do on the tests. More than half the states now require tests for student promotion or graduation.

by Peter Schrag

funding for individual schools and for teachers'

But a backlash has begun.

- In Massachusetts this spring some 300 students, with the support of parents, teachers, and community activists, boycotted the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests (“Be a hero, take a zero”) and demanded that if students had good enough records or showed other evidence of achievement, they be allowed to graduate even if they hadn’t passed the test. Last November, after a strong majority of students failed the test, the state board of education lowered the score for passing to the level that the state designates as “needs improvement.”
- In Wisconsin last year the legislature, pressed by middle-class parents, refused to fund the exit examination that the state had approved just two years earlier. After an extended battle with Governor Tommy Thompson, who has been a national leader in the push for higher standards and greater accountability, a compromise was reached under which student achievement will be assessed on a variety of criteria. Failing the exam will not result in the automatic denial of a diploma.

• In Virginia this spring parents, teachers, and school administrators opposed to the state’s Standards of Learning assessments, established in 1998, inspired a flurry of bills in the legislature that called for revising the tests or their status as unavoidable hurdles for promotion and graduation. One bill would also have required that each new member of the state board of education “take the eighth grade Standards of Learning assessments in English, mathematics, science, and social sciences” and that “the results of such assessments . . . be publicly reported.” None of the bills passed, but there’s little doubt that if the system isn’t revised and the state’s high failure rates don’t decrease by 2004, when the first Virginia seniors may be denied diplomas, the political pressure will intensify. Meanwhile, some parents are talking about Massachusetts-style boycotts.

• In Ohio, where beginning next year fourth-graders who fail the Ohio Proficiency Tests will be held back, a growing coalition of parents and teachers—members of the Freedom in Education Alliance, Parents Against Unfair Proficiency Testing, and other groups—are circulating petitions to place a referendum on the ballot to amend or repeal the state’s testing laws.

• In New York a policy requiring that all students pass Regents examinations in a variety of subjects in order to graduate is increasingly the subject of controversy. Three former members of the State Board of Regents who helped to develop the policy issued a position paper earlier this year saying that they had never expected that all students would be held to a single standard, and calling for a re-examination of the policy. "The thinking [when I voted for the test requirement] was that everyone would take the exams," one of them told *The New York Times*, "but you could get a diploma through other channels."

THE backlash, touching virtually every state that has instituted high-stakes testing, arises from a spectrum of complaints: that the focus on testing and obsessive test preparation, sometimes beginning in kindergarten, is killing innovative teaching and curricula and driving out good teachers; that (conversely) the standards on which the tests are based are too vague, or that students have not been taught the material on which the tests are based; that the tests are unfair to poor and minority students, or to others who lack test-taking skills; that the tests overstress young children, or that they are too long (in Massachusetts they can take thirteen to seventeen hours) or too tough or sim-

*In most cases tests
and standards
were imposed with
little input from
teachers or parents.*

ply not good enough. In Massachusetts, according to students protesting MCAS, some students designated as needing improvement outscored half their peers on national standardized tests. "Testing season is upon us," says Mickey VanDerwerker, a leader of Parents Across Virginia United to Reform SOL, "and a lot of kids are so nervous they're throwing up." In Oakland, California, a protest organizer named Susan Harman is selling T-shirts proclaiming HIGH STAKES ARE FOR TOMATOES.

Some of the backlash comes from conservatives who a decade ago battled state-imposed programs that they regarded as anti-family exercises in political correctness. Although she has always thought of herself as a "bleeding-heart liberal," Mary O'Brien, a parent in Ohio who calls herself "an accidental activist" and is the leader of the statewide petition drive against the Ohio Proficiency Tests, complains that the state has no business trying to control local school curricula. In suburban Maryland this spring some parents kept their children out of school on test days, because they regard the Maryland School Performance and Assessment Program as a waste of time. They complain that it is used only to evaluate schools, not students—thereby objecting to almost precisely what parents in some other states are demanding. "It's more beneficial to have my child in his seat in the fifth grade practicing long division," one Maryland parent told a *Washington Post* reporter.

But many more of the protesters—parents, teachers, and school administrators—are education liberals: progressive followers of John Dewey, who believe that children should be allowed to discover things for themselves and not be constrained by "drill-and-kill" rote learning. They worry that the tests are stifling students and teachers. Most come from suburbs with good, even excellent, schools. Instead of the tests they want open-ended exercises—portfolios of essays, art and science projects, and other "authentic assessments"—that in their view more genuinely measure what a student really knows and can do. They have gotten strong reinforcement from, among others, FairTest, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, which opposes standardized testing; Senator Paul Wellstone, of Minnesota, who is sponsoring an anti-testing bill in Congress; Alfie Kohn, a prolific writer and polemicist who argues that the standards movement is a travesty that has "turned teachers into drill sergeants" in the traditionalist belief that "making people suffer always produces the best results"; and Gerald Bracey, an education researcher and a critic of the widespread belief that U.S. students are far behind their peers overseas, which has given impetus to the standards movement.

The anti-testing backlash is beginning to cohere as an integrated national effort. Earlier this year some 600 test critics attended a national conference on high-

stakes testing, at Columbia University's Teachers College, to discuss effects, alternatives, and strategies: how to get the attention of legislators, what kinds of cases would be suited to civil-rights litigation, what assessments ensure accountability, how to achieve higher standards without high-stakes tests. Some on the left believe that the whole standards movement is a plot by conservatives to show up the public schools and thus set the stage for vouchers. All believe that poor and minority kids, who don't test well, are the principal victims of the tests and the standards movement. They contend (correctly) that almost no testing experts and none of the major testing companies endorse the notion of using just one test to determine promotion or graduation or, for that matter, the salaries of teachers and principals. But so far legislators and governors haven't paid much attention.

Among the most articulate critics of the tests are the boycotting students, who complain about narrowing opportunities and shrinking curricula. The most exciting ninth-grade course in his school, says Will Greene, a high school sophomore in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, is a science-and-technology class with a lot of hands-on experimentation. In the 1998–1999 school year, when students could take the class without worrying about MCAS, eighty students enrolled; this past year enrollment fell to thirty. Greene says that students feel the course will not help them pass the test, and failing the test next year could mean they don't get a diploma. "At least create a test," wrote Alison Maurer, an eighth-grader in Cambridge, Massachusetts, "that doesn't limit what students learn, something that shows what we have learned, not what we haven't."

THE movement is a long way from achieving critical mass. The two most prominent lawsuits brought to date—one in Texas, challenging the test as racially biased; the other in Louisiana, arguing that students hadn't had a chance to learn the material—have failed. The boycotts are still small, and polls, by Public Agenda and other organizations, continue to show that 72 percent of Americans—and 79 percent of parents—support tougher academic standards and oppose social promotion "even if [the outcome is] that significantly more students would be held back." Those numbers seem to reinforce

the argument of Diane Ravitch, an education historian, an education official in the Bush Administration, and a strong supporter of standards, who has described the protesters as “crickets”—few in number, but making a disproportionate amount of noise. “There’s tremendous support” for tests, Ravitch says, “among elected officials and in the business community.” She may also be correct when she says that a great many of those who profess to oppose the high-stakes tests oppose all testing and all but the fuzziest standards. They are the same people, Ravitch argues, who in the end cheat kids by demanding too little and forever blaming children’s inability to read or to do elementary math on the shortcomings of parents, neighborhoods, and the culture. Scrap the tests and we’re back to the same neglect and indifference, particularly toward poor, marginal students, that we had before. Letting students who can’t read, write, or do basic math graduate is doing no one a favor.

Yet even Ravitch is concerned about what she calls the “test obsession” and the backlash it could create if large numbers of students fail and the whole system unravels. The accountability structure in Virginia has been set up in such a way that even if the vast majority of students pass the tests, a large percentage of schools could fail the accompanying Standards of Accreditation. Under the SOA, any school in which more than 30 percent of students fail in 2007 will be subject to loss of accreditation. That, according to a study by the conservative Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy, in Springfield, Virginia, is a formula that fosters public distrust of both the schools and the system. The study points out that because high-scoring students are concentrated in just a handful of districts, only 6.5 percent of Virginia schools met the SOA in 1999, when 35 percent of all Virginia students passed all the required SOL tests.

The Jefferson Institute study illustrates a wider set of problems underlying the new standards and tests. In an effort to look like the toughest guy on the block, some states have imposed standards that will be difficult if not impossible for many students and schools to meet. Members of the Virginia Board of Education are negotiating over allowing students to graduate without necessarily passing a standardized test. As noted, Massachusetts has already lowered the passing score on MCAS. A policy in Los Angeles to hold back all

failing students has been modified. And merit-scholarship systems have been created in Michigan and California to keep top students from blowing off the test. The states that have had the least trouble with backlash are those, like Texas, that set standards low enough (and the Texas standards are far too low, in the view of some critics) that a large percentage of students can pass the tests.

It is, of course, in the public ambivalence about where the bar should be set that the larger uncertainty about the standards movement lies. Robert B. Schwartz, the president of Achieve, an organization created in 1996 by governors and business executives to defend the standards movement (at that time mostly against conservative attacks), recognizes that despite the polls, “not enough has been done to bring the public along.” In most cases the tests and standards were imposed from the top down, with little input either from teachers—often regarded as the problem rather than the solution—or from parents (who in Arizona and California are not even allowed to see old test questions). What’s needed now, Schwartz says, is to bolster public understanding and “capacity building,” including professional development for teachers, to make the whole system work. “The good news,” he told a reporter from *Education Week* in April, is that “states are not simply stopping with raising the bar, and shouting at kids and teachers to jump higher, but are moving to address the support question.”

The question, as Schwartz knows, is whether resources—and particularly the quality of teaching in inner cities—will catch up with the demands on students. Since April, Schwartz has also acknowledged that as the day of reckoning approaches for millions of American students, the backlash will spread and intensify. “It’s easy to assent in the abstract,” he told me recently. “When it’s my kid, it’s something different.” In the mid-1990s Delaware threw out a testing program because, in the words of Achieve, the legislature “had been unprepared for high rates of student failure.”

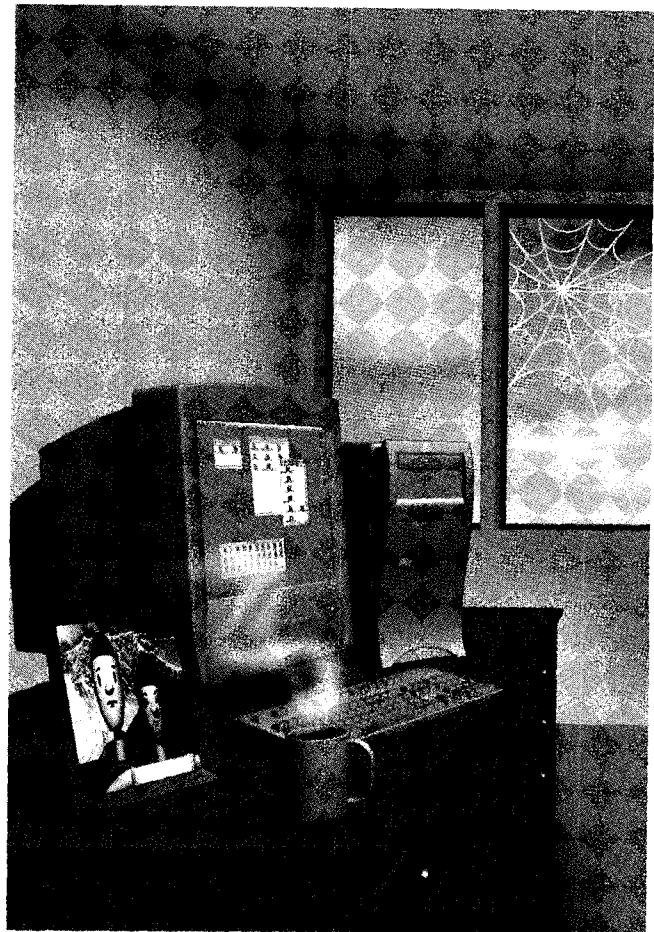
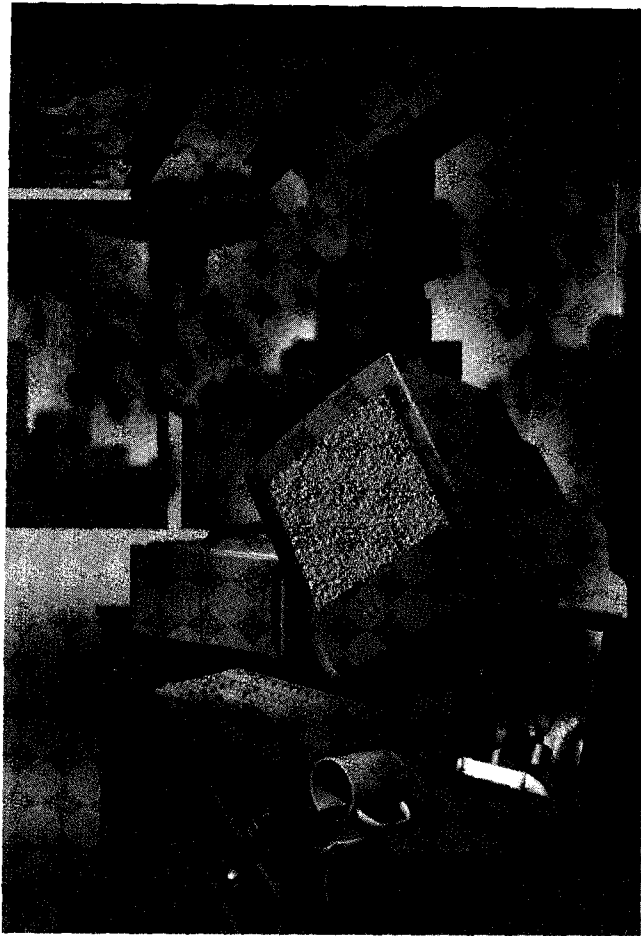
In his state of education speech in February the U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, a strong advocate of accountability and standards, seemed to recognize the danger. “Setting high expectations,” he said, “does not mean setting them so high that they are unreachable

except for only a few. . . . If all of our efforts to raise standards get reduced to one test, we’ve gotten it wrong. If we force our teachers to teach only to the test, we will lose their creativity. . . . If we are so consumed with making sure students pass a multiple-choice test that we throw out the arts and civics then we will be going backwards instead of forward.”

And yet the line between the political drive to be tough and indifference to standards in the name of creativity and diversity sometimes seems hard to draw. Diane

*Some protesters
complain that students
are being constrained
by “drill-and-kill”
rote learning.*

Ravitch says that a person much missed in this debate is the late Albert Shanker, a longtime president of the American Federation of Teachers, who was relentless in his push for high standards for both students and teachers. But Shanker also pointed out that if only one standard for graduation exists, it will necessarily be low, because the political system can’t support a high rate of failure. Shanker suggested two criteria: a basic competency level required of everyone, combined with honors diplomas, by whatever name, for students who do better and achieve more. The issue of the tradeoff between minimum competency and what is sometimes called “world-class standards” is rarely raised in any explicit manner, but it has bedeviled this debate since the beginning. As the standards requirements begin to take effect, and as more parents face the possibility that their children will not graduate, pressure to lower the bar or eliminate it entirely will almost certainly increase. Conversely, as more people come to understand that the “Texas miracle” and other celebrated successes are based on embarrassingly low benchmarks, those, too, will come under attack. The most logical outcome would be the Shanker solution. But in education politics, where ideology often reigns, logic is not always easy to come by. ☛



Where No Business Is Good Business

Many American corporations rely on the security of "workplace-recovery centers"—fully equipped but empty office space reserved for the moment when disaster strikes

IN a quiet office park in the Minneapolis suburb of Minnetonka, half hidden by a knoll, stands an unexceptional one-story office building. No sign identifies the building's purpose. Inside is a securities-trading floor with up-to-date computers, data lines to the world's major stock markets, and banks

of telephones. Wall clocks tell the time in Singapore, Minneapolis, and London.

by Jack El-Hai

Not even on the busiest day of the year in the stock markets, typically, do the phones on this floor ring or the computer screens light up. Periodically cleaners come in to wipe away the fine layer of dust that accumulates on the French Im-

pressionist prints in the conference room, the kitchen counters in the break room, the tables, desks, and chairs, and the empty wastebaskets. Except for a skeleton crew of two in the front office, no one works here. Everyone is happy if the work stations that fill the building remain unused as much as possible. In the upside-down world of workplace-recovery centers, of which this building is an example, no business is good business.

The Minnetonka building, which is owned by Comdisco, of Rosemont, Illinois, will open its doors to subscribers when a power outage, a tornado, a fire, a blizzard, a flood, or some other interruption to business strikes. Subscribers—in particular, securities-trading firms—will simply forward their calls and move temporarily to Minnetonka. They will thus avoid the financial losses and ill will resulting from an inability to execute trades; few customers will ever know that any transfer of operations took place.

Although subscribers frequently visit in order to test their disaster-recovery

plans and equipment, the Minnetonka facility has never in its four years under the current ownership been fired up in an emergency situation. Scores of other facilities around the country sit in a state of continuous anticipation, awaiting disasters that may never happen.

Subscribers annually pay \$400 to \$800 per work station for the right to occupy a recovery facility in an emergency, and they will be assessed additional fees (often covered by business-interruption insurance) if they actually begin using it. Today the biggest concentrations of such facilities are near the financial centers of the East Coast. But the business originated in the upper Midwest, when a Minneapolis consultant named Ken Israel, an expert in computer and communications recovery, realized that trillions of dollars in trades were endangered every year because most financial-services firms lacked backup offices and equipment.

ONE day in 1988, as Israel was offering disaster-recovery recommendations to a large brokerage firm, the idea of workplace-recovery centers hit him. "I was highlighting the company's points of weakness, and I saw that data was not the important piece," Israel recalls. "They made their money via communications and trading, and they had a huge exposure [to losses]. They were spending hundreds of thousands of dollars backing up their mainframe computers, but that wasn't what they needed most."

Israel, a slight man who is visibly intense and energetic, conceived a simple, valuable idea: securities traders needed disaster-proof temporary quarters in the event of an emergency, with adequate equipment and connections to the world's securities markets—and he would build such quarters. At first Israel had difficulty imagining what his facility would even look like. Then, searching the Twin Cities for a vacant building, he stopped at one place and peeked through a window. "I got a vision," he says.

His mind's eye showed him a miniature trading floor, a shrunken replica of the space in which his brokerage client conducted its daily business. The building would have satellite-linked phone service and diesel generators supplying backup power. Israel and a partner leased the building, got design assistance from the Securities and Exchange Commission, and established connections to 144 securities

exchanges worldwide. They called their firm Exchange Resources, and they acquired several subscription-paying clients, including the company now known as American Express Financial Advisors.

One of the biggest pools of potential customers was in New York City, and in 1992 Israel persuaded J.P. Morgan & Co. to buy a \$30 million subscription that allowed Exchange Resources to build a facility on Staten Island. In the minds of New Yorkers at the time, terrorist attacks loomed larger than other disasters as threats to business, so the new facility was built "in the last place anyone would look," Israel says—right next to the Fresh Kills landfill, one of the world's biggest garbage dumps. The building has satellite uplinks, low windows designed to foil the assaults of terrorist sharpshooters, and a walk-in electrical generator "that could light up Broadway and still have juice left over for Hoboken," Israel says. "New York could have sunk, and we'd keep on trading."

Exchange Resources later opened workplace-recovery centers in Singapore and England. The English facility, built in an old cookie factory, concealed its true purpose by allowing a local baker to run the ovens, sending the aroma of freshly baked cookies over the neighborhood.

The company's technological capabilities did not remain untested for long. When the "storm of the century" hit New York City in December of 1992, and flooded the streets, a securities-trading subsidiary of National Westminster Bank lost its electrical power and telephone service. By 6:45 A.M. on the next business day seventy-five of the bank's securities traders were doing business out of Exchange Resource's Staten Island facility.

By then, however, Israel was starting to lose his love for the business. Exchange Resources prided itself on the extent to which it could replicate a client's home trading floor—complete with speed-dial numbers programmed into the telephones and framed photos of executives' families on the desks—but clients wanted more. They demanded exclusive space, emergency offices bigger than what their competitors were given, and menus of the catered food they would be served on days of emergency. "Monday had to be Chinese, Tuesday French, the next day pizza—and they were dead serious about this," Israel says. "They wanted eleven bagels toasted light, et cetera. This was

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ass-kissing and not staying focused on the business.”

Meanwhile, the workplace-recovery business attracted well-financed new competitors with roots in the insurance and data-recovery fields, quickly reducing Exchange Resources from the industry leader to a poorly capitalized underdog. In 1995 Israel and his partner sold Exchange Resources to Comdisco.

SINCE then the industry has lost some of its romance. Power outages, dead phone lines, and crashed Internet servers are now possibilities more chilling to corporations than terrorist attacks. Although IBM, Comdisco, and SunGard, the big three in the industry, still have plenty of financial-services and securities-trading firms among their clients (federal regulations in fact require banks and many financial institutions to have disaster-recovery plans), other kinds of

perceived high demand for their dry and electrically self-sufficient offices.

In a hurricane or other disaster any plan to use a workplace-recovery center is doomed if the company doesn't repeatedly practice the relocation of its business operations and prepare for a sudden switchover. To be ready for such testing—let alone a real disaster—many clients keep backup software and disaster-recovery manuals in the recovery center's lockers. Some clients' lockers also hold T-shirts and caps that the lead recovery staffers will wear to maintain order during relocation and recovery.

When companies arrive for testing, which can happen several times a year for days at a time, workplace-recovery centers awaken. GMAC Residential Mortgage bused thirty employees from its customer-service center in Waterloo, Iowa, to a workplace-recovery facility in Illinois, forwarded some incoming calls, started up the computers and GMAC's proprietary software, and watched what happened. It all worked, and the employees were able to do their jobs. The company did its best to see that employees liked their new surroundings. “We were taking them away from their families,” says Mark Kern, GMAC's vice-president of corporate contingency planning and security, “so we got them a nice bus, kept them in a pretty nice hotel, and made them as comfortable as possible.”

Repeated practice helped Mercedes-Benz USA, whose headquarters, in Montvale, New Jersey, endured its share of suffering during Hurricane Floyd. The heavy rains and flooding didn't damage the company's facilities, but they disrupted the electrical power and phone service. Mercedes-Benz runs a twenty-four-hour roadside-assistance center, which handles 5,000 calls a day from stranded motorists; the company declared a disaster and quickly shifted the center's operations to a workplace-recovery facility. In just two hours employees were again taking calls on the toll-free line, twenty miles away from company headquarters. They remained there for three days, while phone and electrical service were gradually restored in Montvale. “The key to success was testing, making employees comfortable, and defining their roles and responsibilities,” says Gordon Michel, the company's disaster-recovery coordinator. “Going through the testing process was just another day

at the office—but in another office.”

Some companies publicize their subscription to workplace-recovery centers, hoping that customers will regard their preparedness as reassuring. Providing uninterrupted service to customers “is part of the values and ethics of my company,” says Tonya York, the vice-president of business-resumption services at the Charles Schwab & Co. brokerage firm, which has contracts to occupy up to 2,200 work stations in recovery centers around the country in the event of an emergency. Although Schwab isn't likely to run an ad campaign featuring its disaster-backup plans, York says, “our customers and investors are becoming more educated every day, and to think they're not thinking about this is unreasonable.”

Other firms—most, in fact—do not discuss their recovery plans in public. Few companies like to admit that they might experience a catastrophe, especially if they are dependent on a feeble and untested recovery program. All the firms that operate workplace-recovery centers keep their complete client lists confidential.

In the future, however, no doubt more and more companies will subscribe. Already many businesses cannot function without such third parties as telecommunications suppliers and Internet-service providers, and the growth of e-commerce will put even more businesses in a position of dependency. If its supplier fails, the business is in trouble unless it has somewhere else to go. “There's a greater expectation that you will be there all the time,” York says. “You'll have to recover instantly [from a disaster] or have a redundant environment somewhere so that you will always be up.”

Disasters of a magnitude sufficient to require companies to activate their workplace-recovery contracts remain infrequent. Many recovery facilities go for years without housing anybody in actual distress—and their owners make money regardless. During those times staff members at the centers assist with testing, keep their places in working order, and give tours to prospective customers. Still, working in a sizable office building that is nearly empty must get lonely. “I'm used to it,” says Matt Scribner, who runs Comdisco's facility in Minnetonka. All around him computers, fax machines, phones, printers, and coffee machines sit silent, awaiting their chance to come to life. ☛

For emergencies a trading floor was replicated—down to the family photos on the desks.

businesses now also use their services, including health-maintenance organizations, e-commerce enterprises, travel agencies, transportation companies, and auto makers. Anyone who relies on the phone or the Internet to keep in touch with customers is a good prospect for a workplace-recovery center. Often the staff of a company's call center, which handles inquiries or orders from customers, occupies the desks when things go wrong.

This is not to say that only electronic glitches drive businesses to workplace-recovery centers. Industry studies show that whereas power outages and computer hardware and software problems account for about 40 percent of companies' disaster declarations, hurricanes, floods, fires, explosions, and earthquakes cause most of the rest. When Hurricane Floyd soaked the East Coast last September, recovery facilities throughout the area ex-



Between the Vineyards

Italy's Piedmont region has much more to offer the visitor than wine and truffles

PIEDMONT means truffles and Barolo to most food- and Italy-lovers. In fact, it means this to almost anyone who has heard of the region, including Italians. Apart from wine connoisseurs eager to visit cellars and late-fall pilgrims seeking the increasingly rare white truffle, few people go out of their way to visit Italy's

by **Corby Kummer**

northwest corner. Truffle hunters usually leave feeling vaguely disappointed, for good reason. Synthesized "truffle" oils and flavored foodstuffs have raised demand for an item that was always rare and expensive, and have colorized people's expectations of what the flavor of a truffle should be. In its unenhanced state a white truffle is earthy and pun-

gent, yes, but not a garlic-and-chemical bazooka.

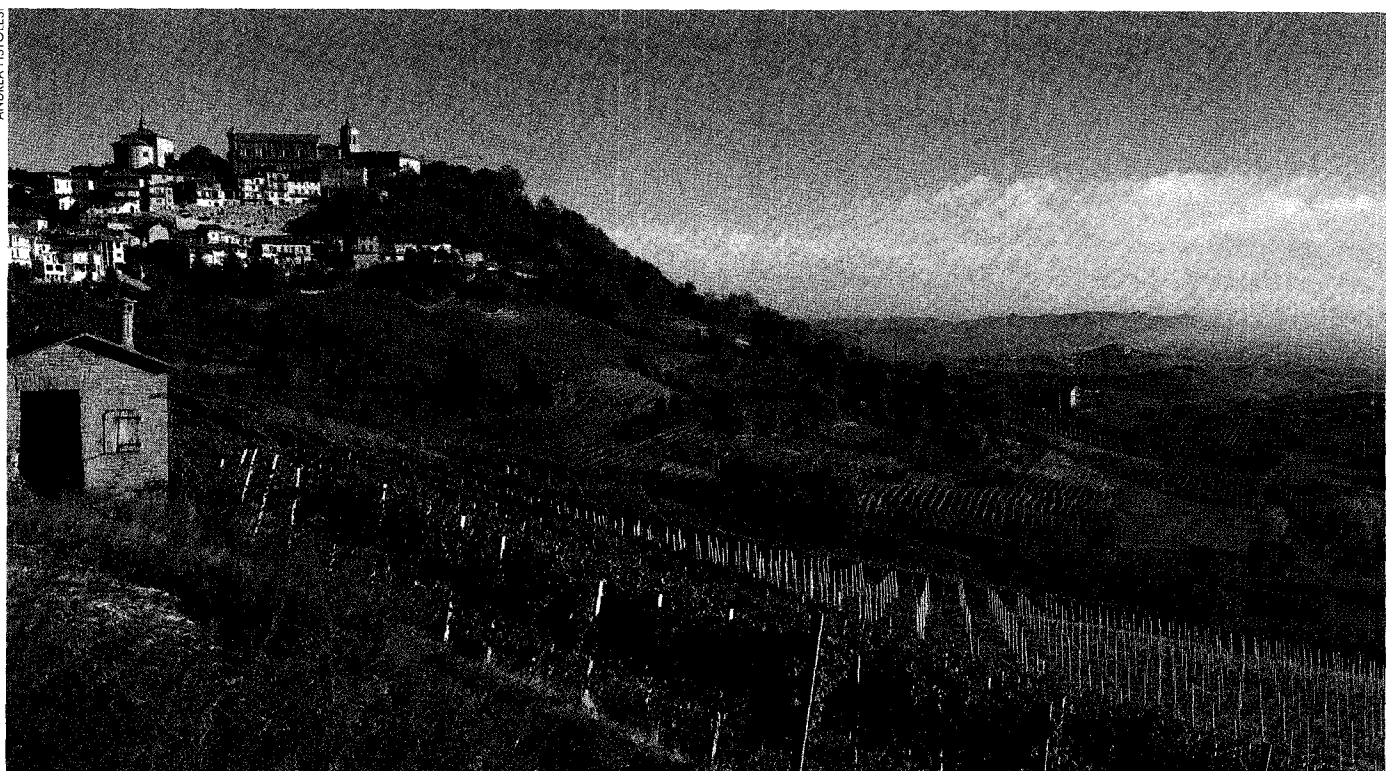
That leaves wine, and the wine of the Piedmont is not disappointing. The region produces Italy's biggest-flavored and best-known red wines and also some of its best whites. Anyone who has experienced the full power of a Barolo—a wine that, I think, can almost be a main course by itself—or the gentle sweetness of a true moscato d'Asti, light in alcohol and irresistibly effervescent, will understand the urge to visit a region that can produce such different and wholly satisfying wines in a compact area.

Happily, there's a good deal more than seeking out rare fungi and great wines to keep a traveler contented in Piedmont. Cyclists know it for its abundance of beautiful bike routes, and gourmets know it as the source of the world's finest-flavored hazelnuts and some of its best chocolates. The cooking of the region, strongly influenced by neighboring France but recognizable as Italian, is itself worth a trip—preferably not during the crowd-

Eclectic architecture in the winemaking village of Dogliani



TOP: JOHN FERRO SIMS/GRAZIA NERI. BOTTOM: ANDREA PISTOLESI



A former fiefdom in the Langhe hills, heart of Barolo country

ed autumnal truffle season. Truffles, says Faith Heller Willinger, the author of *Eating in Italy* (1998), are only a “distraction” from what she thinks of as Italy’s most elegant cuisine.

The best place to discover the good, workaday wines of Piedmont as well as powerhouse Barolos is at one of the many regional enotecas, which offer a thorough selection of Piedmont’s wines and also books, brochures, and maps of wine zones. The vineyards are beautiful, but few receive visitors without appointments. I propose a tour of the Barolo-Barbaresco zone, in the Langhe hills around the cities of Alba and Asti, focusing not on grape varieties or wineries but on chapels and churches. This will lead you along many of the loveliest and most panoramic roads—the ones the winemakers themselves travel.

The chapels I discovered on several recent visits are unique to this part of Piedmont yet little known even there; they are set in the middle of the countryside, not in villages, and they are small, fully realized buildings, not roadside shrines. Many delineate routes from towns to important churches, with fourteen chapels—one for each Station of the Cross—set ten recited Hail Marys apart.

A late-summer trek from chapel to chapel will let you experience the landscape at its lushest, when vines are laden with grapes about to be picked. Visiting at this time also avoids the mid-October truffle stampede (truffles are at their best in mid to late December, anyway).

My own quests are ever for sweets, seasonal produce cooked in tasty and traditional ways, and artisan-made cheeses (in that order). I found them all at a new agricultural-cooperative market and restaurant whose organizer, Elena Rovera, a former schoolteacher I think of as the Alice Waters of Italy, is gambling her savings on a scheme to allow like-minded farmers to adhere to tradition. She, and the seasonally changing landscape around those chapels, are more than enough to bring me back to Piedmont soon.

MUCH of Piedmont has a lost-in-time feel, even if the region is one of Italy’s most industrially advanced (Fiat began in Turin, its capital, a century ago) and is less than two hours by car from Malpensa, the Milan airport that is now the destination of most international flights to Italy. The hills of Piedmont are surmounted by crenelated castles that give it a fairy-tale air. Geography accounts for the feudal rivalries that left such picturesque remnants. Piedmont is strategically located between Northern

and Southern Europe, and so has been contested territory for many centuries. A full 40 percent of the region is covered by mountains, which explains the multitude of fiefdoms and probably explains why the Piedmontese character is direct, open, and hardworking—or so I have found it to be. Other Italians sometimes call the Piedmont manner “false and courteous,” a reputation that may stem from Piedmont’s courtly history: the region was long the seat of the House of Savoy, the monarchy that ruled Italy when it was united, in 1861.

The town I would make my base for red-wine exploration exemplifies this lost-in-time atmosphere. Cherasco was luckily spared the development and reconstruction inflicted elsewhere in Piedmont during the industrial boom of the sixties, and so its small city center, with covered arcades and perfectly rectilinear streets, looks as if it could be from the 1930s and 1940s, judging by the storefronts, or from the 1500s through the 1800s, judging by the architecture. Just behind the main street are palaces with gates through which you can glimpse secret gardens; several of the palaces, handsomely restored, are open for tours. The large piazza houses art and antique-book shows and the largest antiques fair (650 exhibitors) in the region; lovers of high-toned flea markets may wish to sched-



ule a trip around the next one, which will take place on Sunday, September 17.

That weekend it may be hard to stay at the hotel I would like to call home for an extended period: Al Cardinal Mazzarino (telephone 011-39-0172-488-364, e-mail hotel.mazzarino@tiscalinet.it). Here Nucci and Flavio Russo have installed just two guest suites in a historic small palace with all I desire in an Italian habitation: views into a hidden garden, modern jacks behind antique desks, and little local treats in the downstairs salon, such as chocolate-covered hazelnuts, cookies, tea, and Barolo Chinato—Barolo in which medicinal herbs have been steeped to make a digestive liqueur. The room adjoining the salon is Flavio's library, a private retreat so full of tempting curiosities (old games, books, wooden dancing acrobats) that the couple obliges guests by always leaving the door open. The Russos love imparting local history and shepherding visitors to their favorite restaurant, the simple, welcoming, brightly lit Osteria della Rosa Rossa.

Cherasco has an unusual number of good restaurants and wine bars for a town of only about 6,500, perhaps because of the fairs that draw visitors even from other countries. Across from the Rosa Rossa is the larger and more formal Lumaca, in an atmospheric wine cellar. *Lumaca* means "snail," the symbol of the city (and

also of the international movement Slow Food, whose headquarters are in the neighboring city of Bra). Cherasco, improbably, is an international center of snail farming, so snail dishes—not all of them garlic-laden—figure on local menus.

The Russos and the proprietors of the Rosa Rossa are two of three Cherasco couples I met who have decided to live in both the present and the past, restoring and managing historic locales. The third couple are Giancarlo and Carla Torta, who several years ago moved from Turin to take ownership of the Pasticceria Barbero, which makes the only chocolates I find addictive—baci di Cherasco, roughly chopped dark-roasted hazelnuts in mysteriously potent bitter chocolate. A visit in April to the beautiful nineteenth-century premises revealed that the couple hand-sorts the hazelnuts when they are fresh out of a wood-fired oven and enrobes them in chocolate while they are barely cool and at their most fragrant, so that the volatile, slightly smoke-tinged flavors will permeate the chocolate. I learned little more of a technical nature on my visit. Four years ago the childless Barbero sisters, Luciana and Lidia, retired in their late sixties (young in Piedmont) because they could no longer do all the work themselves and refused to reveal the closely held family secrets to an assistant. Their designated heirs, the Tortas,

have a child to raise and need an assistant; they hired an Egyptian, because, they told me, he speaks only rudimentary Italian and has promised not to make his career in Italy.

Cherasco is near the Langhe hills, dense with medieval castles atop valuable vineyards. It's a convenient base for day trips by car or bike (the Russos can direct you to bike-rental shops, and will also generously recommend other inns if they don't have a room free). One of the most picturesque and dramatically situated castles is in Barolo itself—a very small village for a very famous name. The castle, with views of vineyards all around, conveniently houses an enoteca, and a long visit will satisfy an urge to taste storied wines and give a sense of why the land is so precious. If you want to take or ship bottles home, I suggest a visit to Carosso, a gourmet and wine shop in the wine-truffle nexus of Alba, the city to which most Langhe roads lead (it is five miles from Barolo and twelve miles from Cherasco); Walter Carosso, the exceptionally helpful proprietor, tries valiantly to sort through U.S. laws governing alcohol shipments. Initial thirst and curiosity satisfied, you can wander the zone following my unconventional organizing principle.

WHAT is doubtless the most spectacular chapel in Piedmont commands views of much of the Barolo-Barbaresco zone; it sits near the top of a prize Barolo vineyard that is owned by the Ceretto winery, which has done much to help and promote Piedmont. (Grappa-lovers should note that the chapel is a few steps down a hill from the Ceretto distillery; although many wineries send their grape stalks to be made into grappa, Ceretto is the only one to have its own distillery.) Inspired by the Matisse Chapel, at Vence, Bruno Ceretto, who runs the winery with his brother Marcello and their children, had the idea of commissioning modern artists to decorate this chapel, which was built in 1914 of plain design and never consecrated. Three years ago Ceretto invited David Tremlett, an English artist who had worked and exhibited in Piedmont, to restore and decorate the chapel, and Tremlett in turn invited his friend and colleague Sol LeWitt to cover the exterior with one of the wall-filling designs for which he has become celebrated late in his long career. The two artists washed the chapel with bright

colors in strong geometric patterns. The Missoni knitwear family wove vestments according to Tremlett's plan; the Murano glassworks, in Venice, executed his window designs. Last fall the chapel was dedicated and opened daily to visitors.

Equally out of the ordinary—deeply eccentric, in fact—are the fourteen chapels in the nearby town of Dogliani, just a few miles from Barolo along vineyard-lined roads, designed by Giovan Battista Schellino, an architect whose mid-nineteenth-century designs in the eclectic style draw heavily on medieval, Gothic, and Baroque elements. (Dogliani is in the heart of dolcetto and Barbaresco country and in cheese country, too: Giuseppe Occelli, one of Italy's most respected food artisans, makes exceptional cheese and butter in the next-door village of Farigliano.) Dogliani, Schellino's native town, has the greatest concentration of his works and shows his facility at restoring medieval castles and putting neoclassical façades on churches; he even designed a medieval-themed water tower. The devout architect donated a series of visionary designs to

the Church, including a monumental entrance to the Dogliani cemetery (built from 1855 to 1867). The intense faith evident in its dreamlike forms—spiky Gothic mixed with Moorish and incipient Art Nouveau—gives the entrance the fascination of early Gaudí. The fourteen chapels, which lead from the cemetery to a modest church Schellino built, draw on different components of the styles he almost eerily mastered. The grandness of vision makes each seem to be a model for a much larger building.

If you thread several more miles through vineyard country, you will come upon another Via Dolorosa of chapels, these roughly identical and perfectly neoclassical. This circuit is from the cathedral in the hilltop bishopric of Mondovì to the startling sanctuary of Vicoforte in the plains below. Mondovì, fifteen miles from Dogliani and ten from Barolo, is a lively agricultural center with covered shopping arcades and thriving cafés and bars, appealing for its bustle and lack of self-consciousness. The cathedral is in the high, original part of the city, Mondovì Piazza, which also has a handsome Baroque town hall faced in the quietly sumptuous patterned brick that is characteristic of

Piedmont. (A well-run enoteca, with sweeping views, also sits in the piazza.) I longed to follow this route on a bike—starting at the cathedral, that is, because the ride to Vicoforte is straight downhill.

The vast cupola of the sanctuary rises like an apparition over a squat, square Baroque brick-faced church. The unlikely site is said to be where a hunter mistakenly shot an image of the Virgin painted on a rustic pillar; noble Savoy decided that this was a miraculous site and one worthy to house their tombs (ultimately most Savoy tombs were placed instead in Turin). The cupola, built in the early 1700s, is the largest elliptical dome in the world. Simply to experience its 240-foot height from the church below, which it entirely dominates, is memorable, and nothing in Piedmont matches the surprise of seeing the dome come into view in the middle of the plains.

Visiting both Dogliani and Mondovì would make a very full day's trip from Cherasco, and visiting either town and its surrounding countryside could easily take up a day. I also recommend an excursion into the mountainous landscape that so strongly influences the Piedmontese character. The small city of Cortemilia, which

Beneath the immense elliptical dome of the sanctuary of Vicoforte

PABLO BARRONTIN/GRAZIA NERI



spans the Bormida River, is twenty high and winding miles from Cherasco. On the main street of this quiet medieval town is the Pasticceria Canobbio, which draws hazelnut lovers from afar: Cortemilia is known to have the finest hazelnuts in a region famous for them. Giuseppe Canobbio, the burly and friendly owner, told me that he talks to the hazelnuts as he peels them, because “they have things to tell you.” Canobbio has listened well. Hazelnut torte, which in other hands is often buttery to the point of leadenness, is in his hands light in texture but heavy in flavor, and his *brutti ma buoni*—crunchy hazelnut meringue cookies—will reset your standards for hazelnuts.

Oh, the church: Madonna della Pieve, less than a mile outside town, is a perfectly preserved twelfth-century gray-fieldstone church and abbey, surrounded by dry walls with blind arches that rise into the vineyards they protect like Towers of Babel in a Brueghel painting. In other regions this would be a well-known and well-guarded monument. Here it’s a lonely wonder.

PEOPLE come from abroad to dine at Piedmont’s big-deal restaurants. Chief among these is Da Guido, often called the best restaurant in Italy, in the basement of a remarkably dreary 1960s mini-mall in the otherwise pretty town of Costigliole d’Asti. I always visit, out of affection and esteem for the owners, the Alciati family, and to taste again the *tajarin*—Piedmont’s very rich, very lightweight tagliarini, of which Da Guido serves the gold standard. Costigliole also merits a stop for the Italian Culinary Institute for Foreigners, a beautifully equipped cooking school in the imposing Costigliole castle. Although geared to professionals, the school offers tours of the premises, short courses, and culinary tours of the region which include simple but comfortable accommodation (www.icif.com). For information on noteworthy restaurants, hotels, and inns, consult my Italy lodestars, the authors Fred Plotkin (*Italy for the Gourmet Traveler*) and Faith Heller Willinger, and also the Web site of Gambero Rosso, publishers of the best-informed Italian guides (www.gamberorosso.it, available in English).

My preference is always for rustic simplicity. In Piedmont, I found it at Cascina del Cornale, a converted stucco farmhouse on the main road between Alba and Asti,

where Elena Rovera has installed a market and restaurant featuring many of the region’s best artisan-made products and organic produce. Rovera, an animated woman in her late forties, told me that the idea evolved as she saw her husband forced to sell at a loss his annual crop of apples and pears—old and low-yielding but especially good-tasting varieties that he refused to abandon. Unlikely as it seems, farmers’ markets hardly exist in Italy, and the cooperative the couple has formed hopes to make a profit on its labor-intensive goods by selling direct. Cascina del Cornale can supply picnics of cheese, homemade goose sausage, bread with real flavor (surprisingly hard to find), cocoa hazelnut cookies, and nougat. And traveling cooks without access to stoves can overcome their frustration in the comfortable and casual restaurant, which serves very simple local soups, pasta dishes, stews, and desserts.

Rovera spoke long and passionately of seeking out young farmers and finding rare varieties of pigs and lambs, of trying to rescue the one remaining traditional producer of the mountain cheese Castelmagno (Piedmont’s best-known variety), and of trying to avoid becoming a “zoo” where people will taste wonderful and endangered foods without understanding and participating in the economic struggle necessary to preserve them for future generations. As I listened, I tasted the best minestrone I’d ever had, made with heirloom beans and cabbage, and helped myself to rare cheeses and an opened bottle of a little-known dolcetto. (This is the sort of place that encourages diners to point to other people’s plates and say, “I want that.”) “Barolo and Barbaresco, they’ll survive,” Rovera told me. “The whole world knows them and is willing to pay. It’s the rest I’m worried about.”

The restaurant opened just a few months ago, keeping long and flexible hours so that tourists and truck drivers can have a snack or a meal when they like. But its future is uncertain. Rovera frets late into the night that she and the cooperative’s members lack the resources to keep the *cascina* running until it turns a profit. She doesn’t want to be a noble failure ahead of her time: she has not only ideals but also fellow farmers to support. “I’d rather win this bet,” she told me, as I cut a second strip of tart made with her husband’s apples. I want so much for her to succeed I can taste it. ☪

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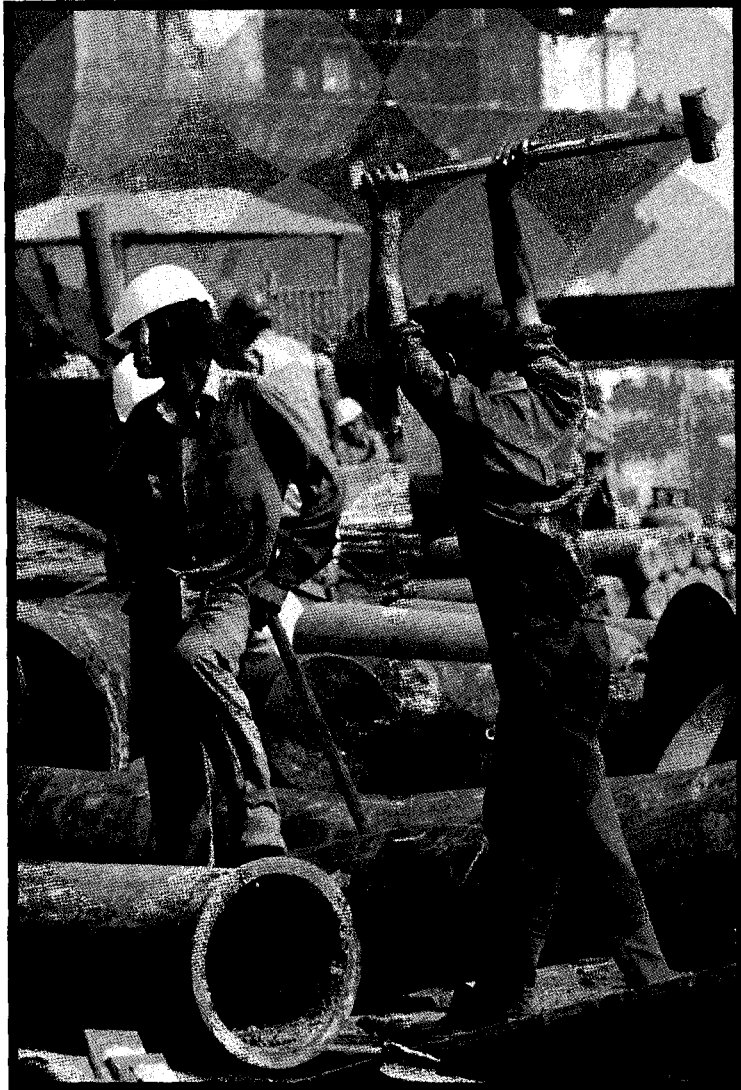
The Shipbreakers

by
WILLIAM
LANGEWIESCHE

*At Alang, in India, on
a six-mile stretch of oily,
smoky beach, 40,000
men work to tear
apart half of the world's
discarded ships, each
one a sump of toxic waste.*

*Environmentalists
in the West are outraged.*

*The shipbreakers,
of course, want to be left
alone—and maybe
they should be*



SHIP CAPTAIN Vivek A. Pandey thought he could have been a fighter pilot. Because his father had flown for the British before Indian independence, Pandey felt he had flying in his blood. When he was a young man, he took the Indian Pilot's Aptitude Test and astonished the examiners with his spatial orientation, his instinct for flight instruments, and the sureness of his reactions. They saw what he already knew—that he was born with the cool. So when he then went to sea, he was not running away but making a choice. He explained it to me with a rhyme, “from aviation to navigation,” as if the two were nearly the same. For seventeen years afterward Pandey ploughed the oceans in cargo ships and tankers, under many flags. He became a captain and lived aboard

his vessels in master's quarters, some of which seemed to him as luxurious as hotel suites. He visited Norfolk, Savannah, Long Beach, and all the big ports of Europe. He liked the tidiness and power of a ship's command, but eventually he got married and felt the pull of domesticity. And so, nine years ago, after the birth of a daughter, he settled in the state of Gujarat, on India's far-western shore.

I found him there last winter, in the black hours before dawn, on a beach called Alang—a shoreline strewn with industrial debris on the oily Gulf of Cambay, part of the Arabian Sea. I'd been warned that Pandey would resent my presence and see me as a meddlesome Westerner. But he gave no sign of that now. He was a sturdy, middle-aged merchant captain wearing clean khakis, sneakers, and a baseball cap. Outwardly he was a calm, businesslike mariner with a job to do. He stood among a group of diffident, rougher-looking men, some in traditional *lungis* and turbans, and accepted offers to share their coconut meat and tea. He checked his watch. He looked out across the dark sea.

A high tide had raised the ocean's level by thirty feet, bringing the waterline a quarter mile inland and nearly to the top of the beach. In the blackness offshore two ships lay at anchor, visible only by their masthead lights. The first was a 515-foot general-cargo vessel named the *Pioneer I*, which hailed from St. Vincent, in the Caribbean. Pandey raised a two-way radio to his lips and, calling himself "Alang Control," said, "Okay, *Pioneer One*, heave up your anchor, heave up your anchor."

The *Pioneer's* captain acknowledged the order in thickly accented English. "Roger. Heave up anchor."

To me Pandey said, "We'll start off." He radioed the ship to turn away from the coast and gather speed. "You make one-six-zero degrees, full ahead. What is your distance from the ship behind you?"

"Six cables, six cables."

"Okay, you make course one-six-zero, full ahead."

The masthead lights began to creep through the night. When the captain reported that the ship was steady on the outbound course, Pandey ordered hard starboard rudder. He said, "Let me know your course every ten degrees."

The answer came back shortly: "One-seven-zero, *Pioneer One*." The turn was under way.

"One-eight-zero, *Pioneer One*." I had to imagine, because I could not see, that great mass of steel trembling under power and swinging toward the shore in the hands of its crew. The captain called the changing courses with tension in his voice. I got the impression he had not done this before. But Pandey was *nonchalant*. He gazed at silhouettes of sheds that were at the top of the beach. He sipped his tea. The radio said, "One-nine-zero . . . two-zero-zero . . . two-one-zero."

Pandey began talking about the Pilot's Aptitude Test that he had taken years before. He said, "It's a test for which you can appear only once in your lifetime. Either you have the aptitude to be a pilot or you don't, so it is a one-time course in a lifetime. And very interesting . . ."

"Two-two-zero."

On that test, using mechanical controls, Pandey had kept a dot within the confines of a 1.5-inch moving square. Now, using a hand-held radio, he was going to ram the *Pioneer*, a ship with a beam of seventy-five feet, into a plot on the beach merely ninety-eight feet wide. It was presumptuous of him, and he knew it. I admired his cool.

The lights of the ship grew closer. The radio said, "Two-three-zero."

THE SHIP drove hard onto the beach, carried by its weight, slowing under full power until the rudder no longer functioned and the hull veered out of control and slid to a halt. Suddenly it became nothing more than a ferrous corpse.

Pandey said, "Okay, Captain, you are ballasting, no?"

"Yes, sir, we are ballasting. Ballasting is going on."

"Very good, please continue."

The numbers counted up. At "three-one-zero," with the *Pioneer* now close offshore, Pandey finally showed some emotion. Raising his voice, he said, "Okay, make three-two-zero, steady her. Okay, now you give maximum revolution, Captain! Give maximum revolution!"

I went down to the water's edge. The *Pioneer* came looming out of the darkness, thrashing the ocean's surface with its single screw, raising a large white bow wake as it rushed toward the beach. I could make out the figures of men peering forward from the bridge and the bow. Now the sound of the bow wave, like that of a waterfall, drowned the drumming of the engine. A group of workers who had been standing nearby scattered to safety. I stayed where I was. Pandey joined me. The *Pioneer* kept coming. It was caught by an inshore current that carried it briefly to the side. Then the keel hit the bottom, and the ship drove hard onto the flooded beach, carried by its weight, slowing under full forward power until the rudder no longer functioned and the hull veered out of control and slid to a halt not a hundred yards from where we stood. Anchors the size of cars rattled down the sides and splashed into the shallows. The engine stopped, the lights switched off in succession from bow to stern, and abruptly the *Pioneer* lay dark and still.

I know that a ship is an inanimate object, but I cannot deny that at that moment the *Pioneer* did die. It had been built in Japan in 1971, and had wandered the world under various owners and names—*Cosmos Altair*, *Zephyrus*, *Bangkok Navee*, *Normar Pioneer*. And now, as I stood watching from the beach, it became a ferrous corpse—in Indian law as well as in practice no longer a ship but just a mass of imported steel. The seamen who lingered aboard, probing the dead passageways with their flashlight beams, were waiting for the tide to go out, so that they could lower a rope ladder, climb down

the side, and walk away on dry ground. The new owner would have his workers start cutting the corpse in the morning.

I asked Pandey if he found this sad, and he answered emphatically that he did not. He was a powerful state official in a nation of powerful officials: he was the port officer of Alang, a man who rode in a chauffeured car with a state emblem on the hood, and it was important to him to appear rational at all times. But the truth, I thought later, might even be that he *enjoyed* these ship killings. He told me that during his tenure he had personally directed every one—altogether several thousand by now—and he took me along to his next victim, a small cargo vessel also from the Caribbean, which he had already sent speeding toward its destruction. He was proud of his efficiency. He mentioned a personal record of seven ships in succession. He was Pandey the ace, a champion executioner.

Then dawn spread across his gargantuan landscape—Alang, in daylight barely recognizable as a beach, a narrow, smoke-choked industrial zone six miles long, where nearly 200 ships stood side by side in progressive stages of dissection, yawning open to expose their cavernous holds, spilling their black innards onto the tidal flats, and submitting to the hands of 40,000 impoverished Indian workers. A narrow, roughly paved frontage road ran along the top of the beach, parallel to the ocean. It was still quiet at dawn, although a few battered trucks had arrived early, and were positioning themselves now for the day's first loads of steel scrap. On the ocean side the frontage road was lined by the metal fences

that defined the upper boundaries of the 183 ship-breaking yards at Alang. The fences joined together into an irregular scrap-metal wall that ran intermittently for most of the beach, and above which the bows of ships rose in succession like giants emerging from the sea. Night watchmen were swinging the yard gates open now, revealing the individual plots, each demarcated by little flags or other markers stuck into the sand, and heavily cluttered with cut metal and

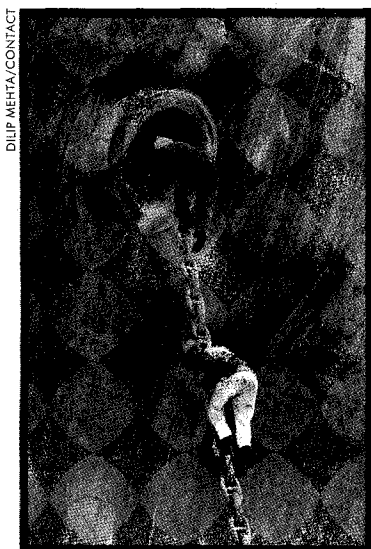
naautical debris. The yards looked nearly the same, except for their little offices, usually just inside the gates. The most marginal yards could afford only flimsy shacks or open-sided shelters. The more successful yards had invested in more solid structures, some of concrete, with raised verandahs and overhead fans.

The workers lived just across the frontage road, in a narrow shantytown with no sanitation, and for the most part with no power. The shantytown did not have a name of its own. It

stretched for several miles through the middle of Alang, and had a small central business section, with a few small grocery stalls and stand-up cafés. It was dusty, tough, and crowded. Unemployment there was high. The residents were almost exclusively men, migrants from the distant states of Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. They toiled under shipyard supervisors, typically from their home states or villages, who dispensed the jobs, generally in return for a cut from the workers' already meager pay. The workers chose to work nonetheless, because the alternatives were worse. In the morning light now, they emerged from their shacks by the thousands and moved across the frontage road like an army of the poor. They trudged through the yards' open gates, donned hard hats, picked up crowbars and sledgehammers, and lit crude cutting torches. By eight o'clock, the official start of the workday, they had sparks showering from all the ships nearby, and new black smoke rising into the distance along the shore.

ALANG is a wonder of the world. It may be a necessity, too. When ships grow old and expensive to run, after about twenty-five years of use, their owners do not pay to dispose of them but, rather, the opposite—they sell them on the international scrap market, where a typical vessel like the *Pioneer* may bring a million dollars for the weight of its steel. Selling old ships for scrap is considered to be a basic financial requirement by the shipping industry—a business that has long suffered from small profits and cutthroat competition. No one denies that what happens afterward is a dangerous and polluting process.

Shipbreaking was performed with cranes and heavy equipment at salvage docks by the big shipyards of the United States and Europe until the 1970s, when labor costs and environmental regulations drove most of the business to the dock-sides of Korea and Taiwan. Eventually, however, even these entrepreneurial countries started losing interest in the business and gradually decided they had better uses for their shipyards. This meant that the world's shipbreaking business was again up for grabs. In the 1980s enterprising businessmen in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan seized the initiative with a simple, transforming idea: to break a ship they did not need expensive docks and tools; they could just wreck the thing—drive the ship up onto a beach as they might a fishing boat, and tear it apart by hand. The scrap metal to be had from such an operation could be profitably sold, because of the growing need in South Asia for low-grade steel, primarily in the form of ribbed reinforcing rods (re-bars) to be used in the construction of concrete walls. These rods, which are generally of a poor quality, could be locally produced from the ships' hull plating by small-scale "re-rolling mills," of which there were soon perhaps a hundred in the vicinity of Alang alone. From start to finish the chain of transactions depended on the extent of the poverty in South Asia. There was a vast and fast-growing population of people living close to starvation, who would work hard for a dollar or two a day, keep the unions



DILIP MEHTA/CONTACT



out, and accept injuries and deaths without complaint. Neither they nor the government authorities would dream of making an issue of labor or environmental conditions.

The South Asian industry took about a decade to mature. In 1983 Gujarat State proclaimed Alang its shipbreaking site, when it was still a pristine shore known only to a few fishermen, without even a dirt road leading to it. Twenty-two shipbreakers leased plots and disposed of five small ships that year. The following year they disposed of fifty-one. The boom began in the early 1990s, as the richer countries of East Asia continued to withdraw from the business.

Today roughly 90 percent of the world's annual crop of 700 condemned ships now end their lives on the beaches of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh—and fully half of them die at Alang. With few exceptions, the breakers are not high-born or

educated men. They are shrewd traders who have fought their way up, and in some cases have grown rich, but have never lost the poor man's feeling of vulnerability. They have good reason to feel insecure. Even with the most modest of labor costs, shipbreaking is a marginal business that uses borrowed money and generates slim profits. The risk of failure for even the most experienced breakers is real. Some go under every year. For their workers the risks are worse: falls, fires, explosions, and exposure to a variety of poisons from fuel oil, lubricants, paints, wiring, insulation, and cargo slop. Many workers are killed every year. Nonetheless, by local standards the industry has been a success. Even the lowliest laborers are proud of what they do at Alang. There is no ship too big to be torn apart this way. More important, the economic effects are substantial—Alang and the industries that have sprung from it



provide a livelihood, however meager, for perhaps as many as a million Indians. Imagine, therefore, their confusion and anger that among an even greater number of rich and powerful foreigners, primarily in Northern Europe, Alang has also become a rallying cry for reform—a name now synonymous with Western complicity and Third World hell.

CAPTAIN Pandey by daylight was less in control than he had seemed at night. He appeared tired, even fragile. We stood on the beach among the immense steel carcasses. I brought up the subject of the international campaign, led by Greenpeace in Amsterdam, to reform the process of ship scrapping worldwide. Although global in theory, the campaign in practice is directed mostly against the biggest operation—the beach here at Alang. I had been told that Pandey took the

campaign as a personal attack—and indeed, at the mention of Greenpeace he struggled visibly to maintain his composure. His face grew tight and angry. He spoke emphatically, as if to keep from raising his voice. Very clearly he said, “The purposeful propaganda against this yard should be countered. You come and look at the facts, and I’m proud of what I have done over here. So there is nothing to hide.” He sounded secretive anyway. He implied that a cabal of shadowy forces was conspiring against Alang, and that the real purpose of the environmentalists’ campaign was to take the shipbreaking business away from India. He said, “I can show them ten thousand other places outside India, point them out, which are in even worse condition than this. Why should they talk about my country alone?”

Pandey had given his squadron of uniformed guards strict

orders to turn away any foreigners trying to enter the yards through the main gate. But determined foreigners kept slipping in anyway. They worked for environmental and human-rights groups and took photographs of black smoke and red fire, and of emaciated workers covered in oil—strong images that, Pandey felt, did not represent a balanced view of Alang. The moral superiority implied by these missions was galling to many Indians, especially here on the sacred ground of Gujarat, the birth state of Mahatma Gandhi. Recently Green-

peace activists had painted slogans on the side of a condemned ship. Pandey must have taken a special pleasure in running that ship aground.

He was a complex man. He claimed to know that he couldn't have it both ways, that he couldn't invite the world's ships to Alang and at the same time expect to keep the world out. Yet he insisted on trying. After the sun rose, he took me to his office, because he wanted to stop me from wandering through the yards, and then

he escorted me away from Alang entirely, because he wanted to make sure I was gone. I did not mention that I had already been at Alang for more than a week, or that I knew a side road to the site and intended to return.

Shipbreaking, American Style

THE controversy over Alang started on the other side of the world and a few years back, in Baltimore, Maryland, along the ghostly industrial shoreline of the city's outer harbor, where old highway signs warn motorists about heavy smoke that no longer pours from the stacks. Early in 1996 a Baltimore *Sun* reporter named Will Englund was out on the water when he noticed a strange sight—the giant aircraft carrier *Coral Sea* lying partially dismantled beside a dock, “in a million pieces.” Englund looked into the situation and discovered that the *Coral Sea* was a waterfront fiasco of bankruptcy, lawsuits, worker injuries, toxic spills, and outright criminality. Of particular interest to Baltimore, where thousands of shipyard workers had been disabled by asbestos, was evidence of wholesale exposure once again to that dangerous dust. The U.S. Navy, which still owned the hull, was guilty, it seemed, at least of poor oversight. Englund's first report ran as a front-page story in April of 1996. The *Sun's* chief editor, John Carroll, then decided to go after the subject in full. He brought in his star investigative reporter, Gary Cohn, a quick-

witted man who had the sort of street smarts that could complement Englund's more cerebral style.

The two reporters worked on the story for more than a year. Their investigation centered on the United States, where ship-breaking had become a nearly impossible business, for the simple reason that the cost of scrapping a ship correctly was higher than the value of its steel. The only reason any remnant of the domestic industry still existed was that since 1994 all government-owned ships—demilitarized Navy warships and

SELLING OLD ships for scrap is considered a financial requirement by the shipping industry—a business that has long suffered from cutthroat competition. No one denies that what happens afterward is a dangerous and polluting process.

also decrepit merchant vessels culled from the nation's moth-balled “reserve fleet” by the U.S. Maritime Administration—had been kept out of the overseas scrap market as a result of an Environmental Protection Agency ban against the export of polychlorinated biphenyls, the hazardous compounds known as PCBs, which were used in ships' electrical and hydraulic systems. In practice, the export ban did not apply to the much larger number of U.S.-flagged commercial vessels, which were (and are still) exported freely for overseas salvage. Hoping somehow to make the economics work, American scrap-pers bought the government ships (or the scrapping rights) at giveaway prices, tore into them as expediently as possible, and in most cases went broke anyway. As a result of these defaults, the Defense Department was forced to repossess many of the vessels that it had awarded to U.S. contractors. Conditions in the remaining yards were universally abysmal. The problems existed nationwide—in California, Texas, North Carolina, and, of course, Maryland. Englund and Cohn were surprised by the lack of previous reporting, and they were fascinated by the intensity of the individual stories—of death or injury in hot, black holds, of environmental damage, and of repeated lawbreaking and cover-ups. Cohn especially was used to working in the underbelly of society, but not even he had imagined that abuses on such a scale could still exist in the United States. Later I asked him if he had been motivated by anger or moral outrage. He mulled over the question. “I don't know that it was so much *anger*. I think we discovered a lot of things that were wrong and needed correcting. But I wouldn't say that we walked around angry all the time.” Nonetheless the subject became their obsession.

At the same time that Cohn and Englund were investigating the story, the Navy and the Maritime Administration, faced with a growing backlog of rotting hulls, were pressuring the EPA to lift its export ban. They wanted the freedom to sell government ships for a profit on the South Asian scrap market.



Englund and Cohn realized that their investigation required a visit to the place where many of these ships would end up if the ban were lifted—a faraway beach called Alang.

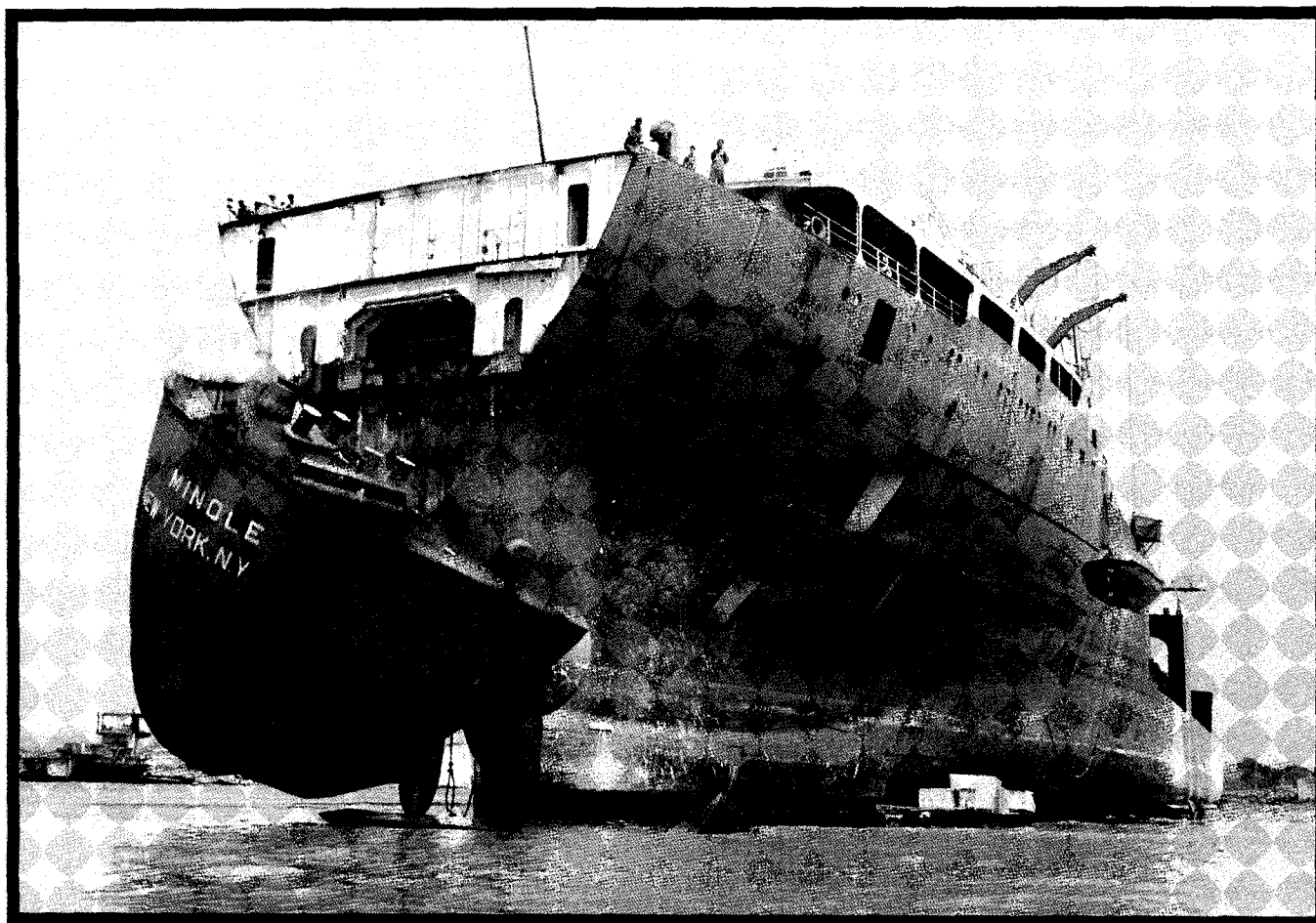
The *Sun* hired an Indian stringer to help with logistics, enlisted a photographer, and in February of 1997 sent the team to India. Alang was still an innocent place: the reporters were free to go where they pleased, to take pictures openly, and to pay no mind to Captain Pandey. The reporters were shocked by what they saw—to them Alang was mostly a place of death. And they were not entirely wrong. Soon after they left Alang, sparks from a cutting torch ignited the residual gases in a tanker's hold and caused an explosion that killed fifteen workers—or fifty. Alang was the kind of place where people hardly bothered to count.

The *Sun*'s shipbreaking report hit the newsstands for three days in December of 1997. It concentrated first on the Navy's failures inside the United States and then on Alang. A little storm broke out in Washington. The Maryland senator Barbara A. Mikulski promptly pronounced herself "appalled" and requested a Senate investigation into the Navy's conduct. She called simultaneously for the EPA's export ban to stay in place and for an overhaul of the domestic program to address the labor and environmental issues brought up by the *Sun* articles. Though Mikulski spoke in stern moral terms, what she apparently also had in mind was the creation of a new Baltimore jobs

program—involving the clean, safe, and therefore expensive disposal of ships, to be funded in some way by the federal government. The Navy had been embarrassed by the *Sun*'s report, and was in no position to counter Mikulski's attack. It answered weakly that it welcomed discussions "to ensure [that] the complex process of ship disposal is conducted in an environmentally sound manner and in a way that protects the health and safety of workers." Mikulski shot back a letter to Secretary of Defense William Cohen: "Frankly, I was disappointed in their tepid comments. We don't need hollow promises and clichés. We need an action plan and concrete solutions."

Her opinion was shared by other elected officials with struggling seaports. The Maryland representative Wayne T. Gilchrest announced that his maritime subcommittee would hold hearings. The California representative George Miller said, "I feel strongly that contributing to the pollution and labor exploitation found at places like Alang, India, is not a fitting end for these once-proud ships." Miller also argued that since the Navy was paying the cleanup costs at its old bases, it should pay for the scrapping of its old ships as well. It made sense. Certainly the U.S. government could afford it.

In the last days of 1997 the Navy surrendered, declaring that it was suspending plans to export its ships. Reluctantly the Maritime Administration agreed to do the same. The government had a backlog of 170 ships awaiting destruction—with



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others scheduled to join them. Faced with the continuing decay of those ships—and the possibility that some of them would soon sink—the Defense Department formed an interagency shipbreaking panel and gave it two months to report back with recommendations. The panel suffered from squabbling, but it dutifully went through the motions of deliberation.

During a public hearing in March of 1998 the speakers made just the sort of dull and self-serving statements that one would expect. Ross Vincent, of the Sierra Club, said, “Waste should be dealt with where it is generated.”

George Miller said, “A global environmental leader like the United States should not have as a national policy the exporting of its toxic waste to developing countries ill equipped to handle it.”

Barbara Mikulski said, “We ought to take a look at how we can turn this into an opportunity for jobs in our shipyards.”

Stephen Sullivan, of Baltimore Marine Industries, said, “We have a singular combination of shipbuilding, ship-conversion, and ship-repair expertise.”

And Murphy Thornton, of the shipbuilders’ union, said, “Those ships should be buried with honor.”

In April of 1998 Englund and Cohn won the Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting. That same month the shipbreaking panel issued its final report—a bland document that reflexively called for better supervision of the domestic industry and wistfully maintained the hope of resuming exports, but also suggested that a Navy “pilot project” explore the costs of clean ship disposal in the United States. By September of last year an appropriation had moved through Congress, and the future finally seemed clear: the pilot project included only four out of 180 ships, but it involved an initial sum of \$13.3 million, to be awarded on a “cost plus” basis to yards in Baltimore, Brownsville, Philadelphia, and San Francisco—and by defini-

tion it was just the start.

This was Washington in action. A problem had been identified and addressed through a demonstrably open and democratic process, and a solution had been found that was af-

fordable and probably about right. Nonetheless, there was also something wrong about the process—an elusive quality not exactly of corruption but of a repetitive and transparent dishonesty that seemed to imply either that the public was naive or that it could not be trusted with straight talk. Even the Baltimore *Sun* had joined in: in September of 1998, when Vice President Al Gore went through the motions of imposing another (redundant) ban on exports, an approving *Sun* editorial claimed that the prohibition “especially benefits the poorly

paid and untrained workers in the wretched shipyards of South Asia.” Patently absurd assertions like that may help to explain why shipbreaking reform, despite all the trappings of a public debate, including coverage in the national press and even ultimately the Pulitzer Prize, actually attracted very little attention in the United States. The people who might naturally have spared this issue a few moments of thought may have had little patience for the rhetoric. Or maybe the subject just seemed too small and far away. For whatever reason, the fact is that the American public did not notice the linguistic nicety distinguishing the government ships in question from the much larger number of commercial U.S.-*flagged* ships, which would remain untouched by the reforms. So an argument about double standards, which should at least have been heard, was expediently ignored. Seen from outside the United States, the pattern was hard to figure out. India, of course, paid attention to the controversy. At Alang, where plenty of American commercial vessels still came to die, people couldn’t understand why the government’s ships were banned. I could never quite bridge the cultural gap to explain the logic. How does one say that the process had simply become an exercise in democracy from above? A subject had been tied off and contained.

Pollution’s Poster Child

TIED off and contained in America, that is. As it turned out, the *Sun*’s exposé did affect Alang, but in a way that no one in Washington had anticipated. The surprise came close on the heels of the Pulitzer Prize, when the hellish image of Alang landed hard in Scandinavia and the countries of the Rhine, where it ignited a popular movement for shipbreaking reform. If it seems unlikely that ordinary people would genuinely care about a problem so abstract and far away, nevertheless in Northern Europe millions of them did. In The Hague a typically progressive Dutch official explained to me that his countrymen had less-frantic lives than Americans, and could spare the time for altruism.

The campaign, which continues today, was led from Greenpeace’s global headquarters, in Amsterdam, by plainspoken activists who started in where American reformers hadn’t ventured—going after the big commercial shipping lines. By this past spring the activists had muscled their way in to the maritime lawmaking forums and had begun to threaten the very existence of Alang.

Their task was made easier from the outset by the work of the emotive Brazilian photojournalist Sebastião Salgado, who came upon the story when it was young, in 1989, and captured unforgettable images of gaunt laborers and broken ships on the beach in Bangladesh. In 1993 Salgado exhibited his photographs at several shows in Europe and in his superb picture book *Workers*, which was widely seen. An awareness of shipbreaking’s particular hardships began to percolate in the European consciousness, as did the suspicion that perhaps



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somehow a caring West should intervene. Then, in 1995, Greenpeace had a famous brush with marine “salvage” when it discovered that Shell intended to dispose of a contaminated oil-storage platform, the giant *Brent Spar*, by sinking it in the North Atlantic. Greenpeace boarded the platform, led a consumer boycott against Shell (primarily at gas stations in Germany), and with much fanfare forced the humiliated company to back down. The *Brent Spar* was towed to a Norwegian fjord

NEARLY 200 ships stood on the beach in progressive stages of dissection, yawning open to expose their cavernous holds, spilling their black innards onto the tidal flats, and submitting to the hands of thousands of impoverished workers.

and scrapped correctly, an expensive job that continued until last summer. Greenpeace had once again shown itself to be a powerful player on the European scene.

It was powerful because it was popular, and popular because it was audacious, imaginative, and incorruptible. It also had a knack for entertaining its friends. When the drama of Alang came into clear view, Greenpeace recognized the ele-

ments for a new campaign. The organization was not being cynical. For many years it had been involved in a fight to stop the export of toxic wastes from rich countries to poor—a struggle that had culminated in an international accord known as the Basel Ban, an export prohibition, now in effect, to which the European Union nations had agreed. Greenpeace considered the Basel Ban to be an important victory, and it saw the shipbreaking trade as an obvious violation: if the ships were not themselves toxins, they were permeated with toxic materials, and were being sent to South Asia as a form of waste. Greenpeace was convinced that ships owned by companies based in the nations that had signed the accord, no matter what flag those ships flew, were clearly banned from export. It was a good argument. Moreover, the shipping industry’s counterargument—that the ships went south as *ships*, becoming waste only after hitting the beaches—provided a nice piece of double talk that Greenpeace could hold up for public ridicule. And Alang, with its filth and smoke, provided perfect panoramas to bring the point home. So Greenpeace went to war.

It was October of 1998, a year and a half after the *Sun*’s visit. Captain Pandey was on guard against trouble, but he must have been looking in the wrong direction. A group of Greenpeace activists got onto the beach by posing as shipping buffs interested in the story of a certain German vessel. They

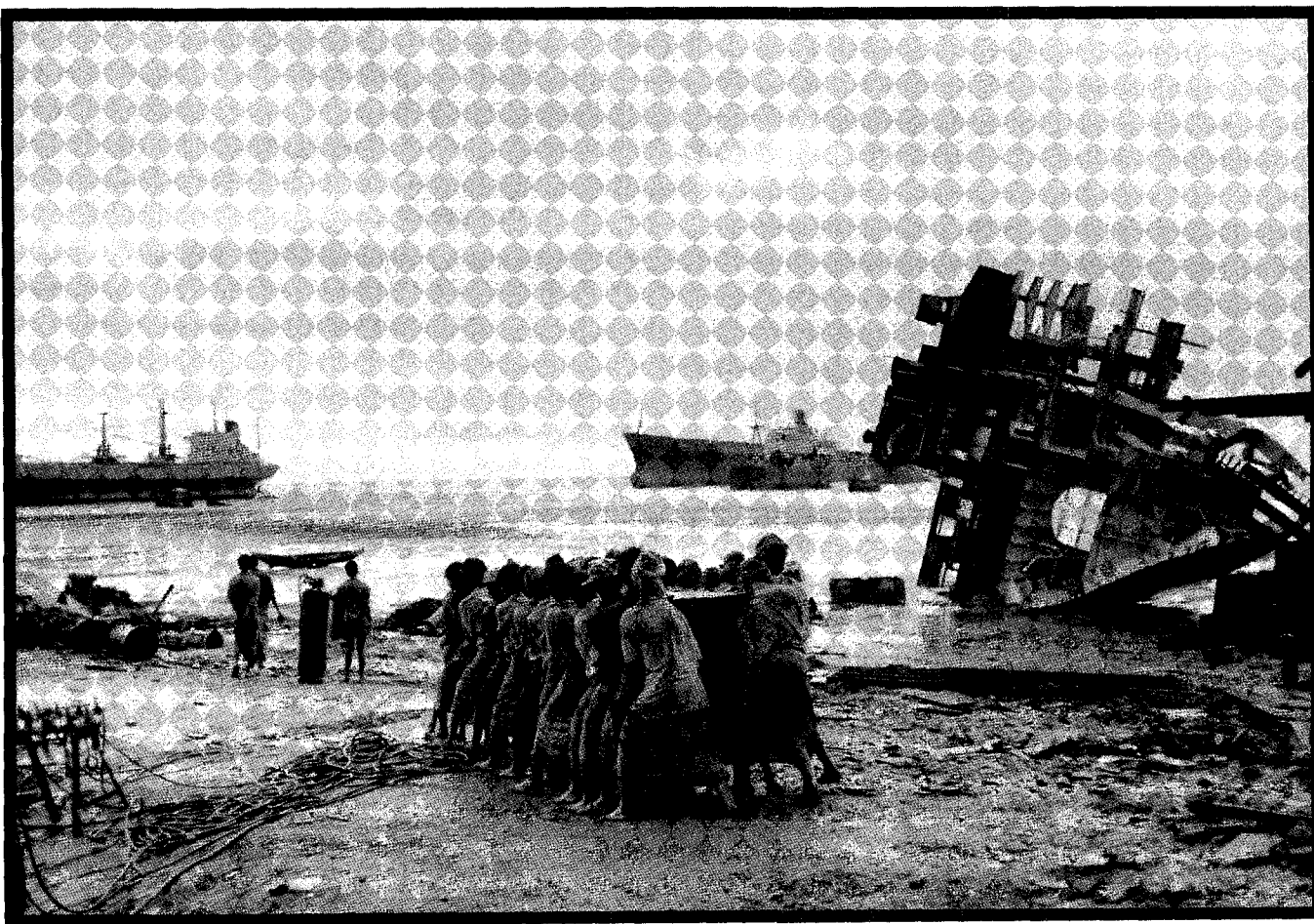
said they wanted the ship's wheel. But they also wandered off and took pictures of the squalor, and they scraped up samples from the soil, the rubble, and the shantytown shacks. After analyzing those samples, two German laboratories quantified what Greenpeace already knew—that Alang was powerfully poisonous, particularly for the laborers who worked, ate, and slept at dirt level there. Greenpeace issued the findings in a comprehensive report, the best yet written on Alang. The report discussed the medical consequences of the contaminants, and described the risk of industrial accidents, which were rumored to cause 365 deaths a year. "Every day one ship, every day one dead," went the saying about Alang, and although the report's authors admitted that there was no way to verify this, it was a formulation that people remembered.

Greenpeace needed a culprit to serve as a symbol of the European shipping business, and it found one in the tradition-bound P&O Nedlloyd, an Anglo-Dutch cargo line that was openly selling its old ships on the Asian scrap market. In the shadowy world of shipping, where elusive companies establish offshore headquarters and run their vessels under flags of convenience, P&O Nedlloyd was a haplessly anchored target: it had a big office building on a street in Rotterdam, and a staff of modern, middle-class Europeans, altruists who tended to sympathize with Greenpeace and would quietly keep it apprised of P&O Nedlloyd's intentions and movements. Also,

because a related company called P&O Cruises operated a fleet of English Channel ferries and cruise ships, P&O Nedlloyd was likely to be sensitive to public opinion. In November of 1998 Greenpeace staged a protest at the company's offices, erecting a giant photograph of a scrapped ship at Alang along with a statement in Dutch: "P&O Nedlloyd burdens Asia with it." The press arrived, and eventually a company director emerged from the building to talk to the activists. He did not appear to be afraid or angry. He said it wasn't fair to single out P&O Nedlloyd, and he made the argument that coordinated international regulation was needed. International regulation was exactly what Greenpeace wanted—but when the next day's paper came out with a photograph captioned "P&O and Greenpeace agree," Greenpeace denied that there had been any understanding.

The truth was that Greenpeace needed resistance from P&O Nedlloyd, and it would have had to rethink its strategy if the company had submitted to its demands and obediently stopped scrapping in Asia. But of course P&O Nedlloyd did not submit—and, for that matter, could not afford to submit. After its brief attempt at openness, it went into just the sort of sullen retreat that Greenpeace might have hoped for. Greenpeace staged a series of shipside banner unfurlings, and it dogged a doomed P&O Nedlloyd container vessel, appropriately called the *Encounter Bay*, as it went about the world on its final errands.

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Millions of Greenpeace sympathizers watched with glee. P&O Nedlloyd was so unnerved by the campaign that in the spring of last year it apparently painted a new name on a ship bound for the Indian beach, in order, perhaps, to disguise who owned it. Greenpeace found out and shouted in indignation. When P&O Nedlloyd then refused to comment, it began to look like an old man turned to evil. This made for good theater—especially against the backdrop of the ubiquitous pictures of Alang. With public opinion now fully aroused, the Northern European governments began to move, introducing the first dedicated shipbreaking initiatives into the schedules of the European Union and the International Maritime Organization—the London-based body for the law of the seas. In June of last year the Netherlands sponsored an international shipbreaking conference in Amsterdam—a meeting whose tone was established at the outset by an emotional condemnation of the industry by the Dutch Minister of Transport. It was obvious to everyone there that the movement for reform was gathering strength. It was hard to know what changes would result—and which shipbreaking nations would be affected. But the reformers were ambitious, and their zeal was genuine. I thought Pandey had reason to be afraid.

IN London last fall I met an affable Englishman named Brian Parkinson, who worked as a trade and operations adviser for the International Chamber of Shipping, an umbrella group of national shipowner associations. Parkinson had a natural appreciation for the anarchy of the sea and an equally natural aversion to the Greenpeace campaign. He said, “Shipping gets blamed for everything. Global warming. Why the British don’t have a decent football team.” For lunch we went to a dark little pub that should have been on the docks. Parkinson told me that he was near the end of his career and was looking forward to retirement. Meanwhile, however, he was struggling gamely to keep pace with the times. He said, “A ship registered in Panama, owned by a Norwegian, operating in the U.S., and sold in India is *not* an export—but we’re not making that argument.” He said, “Maybe there *are* things that shipowners can do.” First, he had in mind a nice bit of public relations: “We’re looking at creating an inventory of hazardous components, a good-housekeeping guide. We want to know how we can present the ship to the recyclers in the best possible way.” I complimented him on the word “recyclers,” and he said yes, right, it was rather good, wasn’t it? But he was toying with something a bit more real as well—a proposal for voluntary self-regulation, under which the industry would inspect and certify the yards at the Asian beaches and then factor in good behavior when choosing which ones to use. He mentioned that Shell had already sent an inspector to a yard at Alang, and that he was said to have written an in-house report. As evidence of progress, this seemed pretty slim. I asked Parkinson what was to keep his scheme from becoming a two-tiered arrangement, whereby a few image-conscious companies would accept the expense of working with certified yards

while all the other shipowners continued with business as usual, selling their vessels to the highest bidders. He said he worried about that too.

At the central train station in Amsterdam a few days later I met Parkinson’s opponent, a leader of the Greenpeace campaign, Claire Tielens, a young Dutch woman with a walker’s stride and an absolutist’s frank gaze. We went to the station café and talked.

I asked her if she had visited India yet, and she said no, but that for several years she had been a reporter for an environmental news service in the Philippines, so she knew about Third World conditions. I said, “Why did you choose Alang? Why does it seem worse to you than the other industrial sites in India?”

She answered, “Because here there is a very direct link with Western companies.”

“But if it’s Western companies at Alang, versus Indian companies somewhere else, what difference does it make to the world’s environment?”

“Because those Western companies pretend to us here with glossy leaflets that they are so environmentally responsible. And it is a shame when they export their shit to the developing world.”

“But from your environmental point of view,” I asked, “what difference does it make who the polluter is, and whether he’s a hypocrite or not? I mean, what is it about shipbreaking? And what is it about Alang?”

I kept phrasing my questions badly. She kept trying to answer me directly, and failing, and going over the same ground. Without intending to, I was being unfair. She should have said, “We needed to make some choices, and so we chose Alang. It was easy—and look how far we’ve come.” I think that would have been about right. Instead she said, “Even by Indian standards, Alang is bad.” But India has a billion people, and it is famously difficult to define.

Dark Satanic Mills

NEW Delhi sprawls on dirty ground under ashen skies. It is an immense capital city, a noisy expression of the Indian democracy, not quite the anarchy that at first it appears to be but a conglomeration of countless private worlds. I found myself there last winter at late-night dinners and garden parties among the city’s large middle class—professionals who drove when they might have walked, and inhabited houses like little forts with guarded gates and shard-topped walls.



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They worried about crime—partly, I think, because they could defend against it. The larger assaults on a life in New Delhi were simply overwhelming. A friend of mine with a small trucking company was concerned about the progressive failure of the city's infrastructure and what that meant for his business. He took me to visit New Delhi's chief urban planner, a powerful official who sat defeated at an empty steel desk in a big bare office, and out of boredom and loneliness detained us with small talk and offers of tea. After we escaped, my friend said, "It's incredible, no? I wanted you to see this. It's like he's sitting there at the end of the world."

But to me it was the pollution in New Delhi that seemed apocalyptic. The streams were dead channels trickling with sewage and bright chemicals, and the air on the streets was at times barely breathable. In the heat of the afternoons a yellow-white mixture hung above the city, raining acidic soot into the dust and exhaust fumes. At night the mixture condensed into a dry, choking fog that enveloped the headlights of passing cars, and crept with its stink into even the tightest houses. The residents could do little to keep the poison out of their lungs or the lungs of their children, and if they were poor, they could not even try. People told me it was taking years off their lives. Yet New Delhi was bursting its seams, because newcomers from rural India kept flooding in.

The big port city of Bombay has a reputation for being just

as dirty, but on the day I got there, an ocean breeze was blowing, and in relative terms the air was clean. When I mentioned this to Pravin S. Nagarsheth, the shipbreaker I had come to see, he grew excited and said, "Yeah! Yeah!" because relativity was precisely the point he wanted to make to me. Nagarsheth was a nervous little man with a round and splotchy face and some missing teeth. He had been scrapping ships for nearly thirty-five years, first with a small yard here in Bombay, and then in a bigger way at Alang. He was also the president of the Indian shipbreakers' association, and as such he had taken the lead in the industry's defense. He had traveled to the Amsterdam shipbreaking conference to counter the reports of abuses at Alang. In his speech there he said, "All these write-ups, I would say, are biased, full of exaggerations. . . . One, however, wonders whether such reports are deliberately written for public consumption in affluent Western societies only. . . . The environmentalists and Greenpeace talk of future generations, but are least bothered about the plight of the present generation. Have they contributed anything constructive to mitigate the plight of the people living below the poverty line in developing countries? . . . Living conditions of labor in Alang should not be looked at in isolation. It is the crisis of urbanization due to job scarcity. Large-scale slums have mushroomed in all cities. . . . The fact remains that workers at Alang are better paid and are probably

safer than their counterparts back in the poor provinces of Orissa, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. To provide housing and better living conditions . . . is financially impractical for a developing country like India, where forty-five percent of the population is living below the poverty line."

We met in the lobby of a shabby hotel in central Bombay. Nagarsheth kept leaning into me, grabbing my arm to punctuate his arguments. He said, "Everybody knows this is bad! It is not a point of dispute! What Greenpeace is saying is even excellent! But their ideology does not provide solutions! This generation cannot afford it!"

Nagarsheth seemed to worry that I would understand the country in some antiseptic way—for its computer industry, its novelists, or maybe even its military might. But the India he wanted me to see was a place that related directly to Alang—an India drowning in the poverty of its people. And so, rather than talking any more about shipbreaking, he insisted on showing me around Bombay. He guided me into the city's slums, which are said to be the largest in the world. Then he led me back toward the city center, for miles through a roadside hell where peasants lived wall-to-wall in scrap boxes and shacks, and naked children sat listless in the traffic's blue smoke as if waiting to die. Nagarsheth said, "Do you see this? Do you see this? You need to remember it when you get to Alang."

He was making a valid point about relative levels of misery. I saw another level a few days later in Bhavnagar, the nearest city to Alang, at a re-rolling mill, where hull plates from the ships were being torch cut, heated, and stretched into reinforcing bars. Bhavnagar is an uncrowded city by Indian standards, with a population of perhaps 600,000 in a physical shell that to a Westerner might seem better suited for perhaps a fourth of that. The re-rolling mill I visited was one of many there. It stood on the north edge of town, on a quiet dirt street wandered by cows, at the end of a crumbling brick wall, beyond the dust and din of the city's auto-rickshaws.

EVEN FOR veteran workers there must be a moment of hesitation at the audacity of the business—using little more than cooking-gas torches and muscle power, they tear apart an immense steel hull, which towers above the crowds on the sand.

The mill had a sagging iron gate. A traveler would normally pass it by, perhaps seeing it as a poor but peaceful scene. But I went inside, past an old brick building where clerks sat idle behind bulky typewriters on an outside porch, and on into the dark heart of the mill—a large, open-sided shed where perhaps a hundred emaciated men moved through soot and heavy smoke, feeding scrap to a roaring furnace leaking flames from cracks in the side. The noise in there was deafening. The heat was so intense that in places I thought it

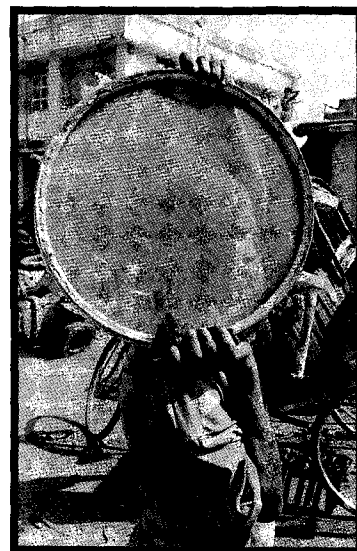
might sear my lungs. The workers' clothes were black with carbon, as were their hair and their skin. Their faces were so sooty that their eyes seemed illuminated.

The furnace was long and low. The men working closest to the fire tried to protect themselves by wrapping heavy rags around their mouths and legs. They cut the steel plates into heavy strips, which they heaved into the inferno and dragged through the furnace before wrestling them free, red-hot, at the far end. Using long tongs, they slung the smoking metal, still brightly glowing, through a graduated series of rollers, which squeezed and lengthened it incrementally into the final product—the reinforcing rods, which were piled together and allowed to cool. It was a punishing and dangerous procedure, requiring agility, strength, and speed, and also the calculation of risk. The workers were quite obviously exhausted by it. Some, I think, were slowly starving, trapped in that cycle of nutritional deficit all too common in South Asia, by which a man may gradually expend more calories on his job than his wages will allow him to replace.

On the Beach

I TRAVELED from Bhavnagar to Alang, thirty miles to the south, on a narrow road crowded with jitneys and trucks, choked with blue exhaust, and battered by the weight of steel scrap. The road ran like an industrial artery across plains of denuded farmland, on which impoverished villages endured in torpor and peasants scratched at the parched earth. Along the way stood a few open-air cafés, where truck drivers could stop for soft drinks and food, and a few small factories, where oxygen was concentrated into steel bottles to be mixed later with cooking gas for use in the cutting operations farther south. But otherwise the roadside scenery remained agricultural until several miles before Alang. There, next to a small house on the right, a collection of lifeboats listed in the dirt. The lifeboats marked the start of Alang's roadside marketplace, where specialized traders neatly sorted and resold secondary merchandise from the ships. There were yards for generators, motors, transformers, kitchen appliances, beds and other furniture, wires and pipes, cables, ropes, life rings, clothing, industrial fluids, and miscellaneous machinery. The traders lived among their goods. The buyers came from all over India.

The marketplace continued for several miles to Alang's



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main gate. But the best way to the beach for a Westerner, given Captain Pandey's concerns about foreigners, was a small side road that branched off a few miles before the main gate and wandered again through rural scenery. I passed a boy herding cows, three women carrying water, a turbaned farmer hoeing. The heat was oppressive. The air smelled of dung and dust. For a while it was almost possible to forget that the ocean was near. But then the road made a turn, and at the far end of a field an immense cargo ship rose above the trees. Behind it, fainter and in the haze, stood another. The ships

YOU

From beyond the borders of memory you seemed to
gaze, enfold, clothe me,
lift me: I was held, washed,

fed. On unsprung legs I swayed and
tottered. Your smile urged me into
walking. Your words urged me out

into words. Your scowl stunned and guarded me. You taught,
scolded, attended. *And now, you vanish.*
What dark seas must I canvass to

undrown you? How far have you drifted,
castaway? I yearn
across pathless waterlands for

a whiff of your remembered fragrance, a waft
of warm arms, the flick and murmur of
your speaking, the fall of your soft song,

the hushed kisses of your mouth.
Who could have thought you would ever so
immoderately disappear? Or imagine

that, no matter how hard I haul
on the ligaments of our fateful
connection, you could never possibly

return, never
respond, never
speak, never
know me?

—PETER DAVISON

seemed to emerge from the earth, as if the peasants had found a way to farm them.

My base at the beach was Plot 138. It was a busy patch of ground, bounded at the top by one of the standard sheet-metal fences. I threaded through piles of sorted scrap, past the smoke of cutting crews, past chanting gangs carrying heavy steel plate, past cables and chains and roaring diesel winches, to the water's edge, where the hulk of a 466-foot Japanese-built cargo ship called the *Sun Ray*, once registered in the Maldives, was being torn apart by an army of the poor. Four hundred men worked there, divided into three distinct groups—a shipboard elite of cutters and their assistants, who were slicing the hull into multi-ton pieces; a ground crew of less experienced men, who winched those pieces partway up the beach and reduced them there to ten-foot sections of steel plate; and, finally, the masses of unskilled porters condemned to the end of the production line, where, piece by piece, they would eventually shoulder the entire weight of the hull, lugging the heavy plates to the upper beach and loading them into trucks—belching monsters painted like Hindu shrines—which would haul the scrap away. And that was just for the steel. Everywhere I looked stood the piles of secondary products awaiting disposal—the barrels of oil and hydraulic fluid and all the assorted equipment destined for the roadside marketplace. In either direction I could look down the coast at a line of torn ships fading into the smoke of burning oil.

Along at first is a scene of complete visual confusion; it begins to make sense only after about a week, when the visual impact fades, and the process of breaking a ship by hand sorts itself out into a series of simple, brutal activities. The first job is to shackle the ship more firmly to the ground. Using motorized winches and a combination of anchor chains and braided steel cables looped through holes cut into the bow, the workers draw the hull as high onto the beach as the ship's draft and trim allow, so that ideally the bow stands on dry ground even at high tide. The winches are diesel-powered machines each the size of a small bulldozer, staked firmly to the ground about halfway up the beach. The stress on the cables during the winching operation is enormous. They groan and clank under the load, and sometimes they snap dangerously. The workers are ordered to stand clear. Nonetheless, some winch operators sit unprotected by safety cages, and gamble that a broken cable will never recoil directly back at them. It's easy to imagine that sometimes they lose.

After the initial dragging is done, the crews climb aboard with ladders and ropes and begin to empty the ship's fuel tanks: they pump the good oil into barrels for resale, and slop the residual sludge of no commercial value onto dry ground, where it is burned. The empty tanks continue to produce volatile vapors, and pose a risk of explosion until they are aerated—a tricky process that often involves cutting ventilation holes. The most experienced cutters are used for this work, because they are believed to have developed noses for dangerous vapors. Even so, there are explosions and fatalities—

though fewer now than before, because of slowly improving safety standards. On some ships the tanks can be sliced off whole, dropped into the water, and winched above the tide line for dissection and disposal. Cutting on hard ground is easier than cutting on the ship, and because the workers are therefore more likely to do the job right, it is also safer. But either way, the yard must demonstrate to Gujarat officials that the fuel tanks have been secured and neutralized before they will give the final authorization to proceed with the scrapping.

With the risk of explosion diminished, the breakers turn their attention to the ship's superstructure, the thin-walled quarters that typically rise five or six levels above the main deck, and in which, because of combustible wiring and wood paneling, the chance of a deadly fire cannot be ignored. The superstructure is like a ghost town, still full of the traces of its former inhabitants. Scattered about lie old books and magazines in various languages, nautical charts from faraway oceans, company manuals, years' worth of ship's logs, newspaper clippings, national flags, signal flags, radio frequency lists, union pamphlets, letters, clothes, posters, and sometimes a much-appreciated stock of liquor, narcotics, or pornography. The scrappers spread through the quarters like hungry scavengers, quickly removing the furniture and galley equipment, tearing into the wood paneling and asbestos insulation to get at the valuable plumbing, stripping out the wires, electronics, and

I WALKED into the depths of the ship through the torn bow. It was eerie and dim on the inside, an immense man-made cavern filled with hoarse warning cries, the hiss of torches, sparks, smoke, heavy hammering, the sound of falling debris.

instruments, and making a special effort to save the ship's bell, always in demand for use at Hindu temples. These treasures are roped down the side and hustled to the top of the beach by ground crews.

Then the cutting begins. It is surprising how few men are needed to handle the torches: by working simultaneously on the port and starboard sides, a dozen competent cutters, backed up by a larger number of assistants, can demolish an entire superstructure within two weeks. Gravity helps. Starting with the overhanging wings of the bridge, the cutters slice the superstructure into big sections. There is an art to this, because every ship is different. The decisions about where to cut are made by the yard's owner and the all-important shipboard supervisor. Within the logical demolition sequence (which with variations runs roughly from front to back and from top to bottom) the general idea is to cut off the largest section that can be cleared away from the ship by the shore-based winches. The height and geometry of the superstructure is a crucial consideration, because it affects the way the sections fall. If

the work has been done right, when the final cut on a section is made, it falls clear of the hull. It lands on the tidal flat with a dull thump. The ground crew walks out to it, attaches a cable, and winches it higher onto the beach to carve it up. Meanwhile, the shipboard crews may already have dropped another section. At this early stage it can be gratifying work. If the superstructure is flimsy, the crews can make the metal rain.

But the work slows when they come to the hull, where the steel is heavier and harder to cut. At that point, even for veteran workers, there must be a moment of hesitation at the audacity of the business. Using little more than cooking gas and muscle power they will tear apart this immense monolith, which towers above the crowds on the sand. It will take six months or a year to finish the job; men will be injured, and some may die. Almost all will to some degree be poisoned by smoke and toxic substances—and more seriously, no doubt, than they would have been on the streets of India's cities. Nonetheless, the poor cannot afford to be timid.

They go after the hull by cutting off the forward section of the bow, opening the ship's cavernous forward hold to the outside, and making room for an expanded force of shipboard cutting crews. Half of them continue to cut at the forward section, slowly moving aft; the other half burrow directly back through the ship, cutting away the internal bulkheads, until they come to the engine room, near the stern. The ship's engine is not usually saved, because generally it is worn out, and in any case it is often too large to be removed whole. The crews open ventilation holes through the sides of the hull, unbolt the engine, disconnect it from the shafts, and cut it apart crudely on the spot. They drag the pieces forward through the length of the ship with the help of small winches placed aboard for that purpose.

To understand why it is important to remove the engine early in the process, consider that the ship continues in part to float throughout the scrapping process, and that high tides lift it, allowing the progressive winchings by which, as the hull is consumed, it is drawn onto the beach. From the start the ship's trim is a consideration. If the angle at which the keel is floating does not match the slope of the ocean floor, the ship may hang up offshore. The trick is not to get the bow to ride high, as one might assume, but, rather, to keep the stern of an unladen ship from riding too low. The stern naturally rides low because of the weight of the superstructure, the engine, and the machinery installed there. Once the scrapping is under way, the correct trim can be maintained only by the judicious removal of weight. Cutting away the superstructure and removing the heavy bronze propeller does not fully compensate for the subsequent loss of the bow section, whose weight, because it lies so far forward of the ship's center of gravity, has a disproportionate effect on the trim. That is why the breakers must go in from the opened bow and take out the engine. Afterward the demolition proceeds so predictably, from bow to stern, that it is possible to mark its conclusion precisely when the ship's rudder lies at last on dry ground, submitting to the torches.

The workers do not celebrate the achievement, because if they are lucky, the next ship has already arrived.

Plot 138, the yard that I settled into, was the domain of Paras Ship Breakers Ltd., a company owned by a man named Chiman Bai, who began his career as an errand boy in the ancient Bhavnagar market and rose to become a shopkeeper selling rice and wheat. Bai got into the shipbreaking business in 1983, when he responded to an obscure notice in the newspaper about the availability of plots at Alang. I never met him, I

think because he felt awkward with foreigners; it was said that he still worked from a back office in the market and that he presided over an extended family of thirty-five, all of whom lived in

a single house in Bhavnagar and ate their meals together in the traditional way, sitting on the kitchen floor. His younger brother, Jaysukh Bai, ran the shipbreaking operation day to day. He was a square-jawed, gray-haired man with a Hindu cloth bracelet and a diamond ring. He did business at an office in Bhavnagar every morning, and in the afternoon made his way to Alang, where he sat among his sons and nephews on a porch overlooking the yard. I sat with him sometimes, drinking the Indian cola called Thumbs Up, breathing the acrid smoke from the final cutting of ship parts, some of which was done nearby. Jaysukh Bai did not seem to notice the smoke. One of his nephews figured that I did. He distrusted me, and repeatedly made that clear. Once he said nastily, "The question I want to ask the environmentalists is if you should want to die first of starvation or pollution."

I said, "They say you don't have to make that choice."

He said, "That's bullshit."

In a place like Alang, he was probably right.

Sometimes I wandered across the road, into the crowded shantytown where the workers lived, a place with shacks built of wood and ship's paneling, some on stilts over a malarial marsh that bordered the beach. There were no latrines at Alang, in part because few of the men would have used them. They preferred simply to relieve themselves in nearby bushes, as they had in the farming hamlets from which they came. But of course Alang was much larger than a hamlet, and as a result the air there was filled with fecal odors, which mixed with the waves of smoke and industrial dust to permeate the settlement with a potent stench. People got used to it, as they did to the mosquitoes, and the flies. Discomfort was an accepted part of living in Alang, as was disease. Thousands of workers who were sick, injured, or unemployed lingered in the shantytown during the day, lying on scavenged linoleum floors by open doorways, or sitting outside in the thin shade

of the walls. There were almost no wives or children. As in other migrant camps, drunkenness, prostitution, and violence were never far away.

Nonetheless, a semblance of normalcy was maintained. For instance, Alang had a good drinking-water system, a network of communal cisterns supplied by truck, which was Captain Pandey's pride. It also had Hindu shrines, informal cricket fields, and enough spare power for its commercial district to run refrigerators and gay little strings of lights. Each evening when the workday was done, the settlement came to life. The workers cooked outside their shacks in small groups intent on the food, and afterward, feeling renewed, they gathered in the light from the cafés and talked. They laughed. They listened to music. Sometimes they held religious processions. Sometimes they danced. And then on Sundays, when by law all the shipbreaking yards were closed, they washed, dressed up, and strolled among friends, looking fresh and clean-cut.

One evening a small group from Plot 138 invited me to sit with them outside their shack, and one of them went off into the slum and came back with a man who could translate. It was awkward for everyone. The men were formal with me. I asked about their work. They knew it was risky and could make them sick, but they seemed more interested in letting me know they were cutters, and stood high on the scrapyards scale. I asked about their bosses, and they named some of the supervisors who had given them jobs. They said that in other yards some of the supervisors were abusive. They offered no opinions about Jaysukh Bai, maybe because they had seen me with him.

After a week Pravin Nagarsheth arrived from Bombay to check on his shipyard, a few plots down from Plot 138. A ship lay there half consumed on the beach. Nagarsheth brought his son-in-law with him, a slim city boy in undersized Ray-Bans who slipped carefully around the workers and confided to me, "The first time I came here, I was totally zapped." He meant he was surprised. He seemed a bit precious. But Nagarsheth was not like that, and neither was Jaysukh Bai. They were direct men who walked willingly among their laborers; and though they had grown wealthy on the backs of the poor, they had maintained a connection to them nonetheless. The alternative seemed to be the disengagement I had witnessed in New Delhi and Bombay, where the upper levels of society were floating free of the ground, aided by the airlines and the Internet, as if the poverty in India were a geographic inconvenience. Nagarsheth's own daughter had graduated from the University of Chicago with a degree in computer science, and he was proud of her. But standing beside him on the beach, in the midst of his piles of scrap, I suspected he knew that shipbreakers were unfashionable among the Indian elites. He may even have been able to see himself as they did—an angry little man with a propensity for mucking around in the world's garbage. In the foreign press I had discerned an undertone of mockery about such things, a vestige of the old colonial amusement at the very idea of native kings. Even the Baltimore *Sun* had indulged in the fun, quoting an interior decora-

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tor from Bombay who ridiculed the flamboyant tastes on exhibit in the shipbreakers' big houses in Bhavnagar. Such public amusement was of course noticed elsewhere in India, especially among the ruling classes, who were so successfully joining the "global" (meaning Westernized) society. Now, in Bombay and New Delhi, a young and soon to be powerful generation was returning from European and American universities speaking the language of environmentalism. And Alang was becoming an embarrassment.

The Future of Alang

ALANG has become a metaphor in the crucial struggle of our time—that between the First World and the Third, the rich and the poor. Beneath our perspectives on a shrinking world lurks an opposing reality, hidden in the poverty of places like South Asia, of a world that is becoming larger—and unmanageably so. Do we share a global ecology? On a certain level it's obvious that we do, and that therefore, at last, a genuine scientific argument can be made for the imposition of Western knowledge. But making this argument is difficult, full of political risk and the opportunity for self-delusion. In practice, the world is as much a human construct as a natural one. The people who inhabit it have such radically different

experiences in life that it can be almost surprising that they share the same air. This is inherently hard to accept from a distance. Too often we have a view of what is desirable for some other part of the world which is so detached from daily existence there that it becomes counterproductive, or even inhumane. Alang is a typical case. Resentful Indians kept saying to me, "You had your industrial revolution, and so we should have ours." I kept suggesting in return that history is not so symmetrical. But of course they knew that already, and viewed Alang with more complexity than they could express to me, and were using a simplified argument they felt I might understand. On the ship-scrapping beach at Chittagong, in Bangladesh, I met an angry man who took the simplest approach. He said, "You are sitting on top of the World Trade Center, sniffing fresh air, and talking about it. You don't know anything."

He was angry about the West's presumptuousness and its strength. He was angry about people like Claire Tielens, at Greenpeace. When I talked to Tielens in Amsterdam, she was unyielding about Greenpeace's demands. She said, "Ships should not be scrapped in Asia unless they are decontaminated and they don't contain toxic materials. New ships should be built in such a way that they can be scrapped safely—so without hazardous materials if possible. The export of toxin-containing



DILIP MEHTA/CONTACT

ships from Western countries to developing countries should be stopped. And if possible, ships should be cleaned throughout their lifetime. If they export clean steel, that's fine with us."

I said, "But ships will always contain toxic wastes. Is it economically possible to . . ."

"Economically"? Well, of course that's a very flexible term."

I thought the economics might be less flexible than she believed. One of the twists in this story is that the U.S. government, an entity that Greenpeace has a prerogative to dislike, has become without question the world's most principled shipowner, and as such is leading the way in establishing the real costs of doing things right. I spent an afternoon last winter at an anchorage run by the Maritime Administration on the James River in Virginia, climbing through floating wrecks among the ever-growing number of government derelicts awaiting a proper domestic disposal. On one ship a workman had painted SINK ME! as a way of tempting fate. All these ships were rusting through. The annual costs for routine monitoring, pumping, and patching amounted to an average of about \$20,000 per vessel. That may not seem like much, but many of the hulls were in such poor condition that to keep them from sinking, they would soon have to be dry-docked for million-dollar repairs—only to be towed back to their moorings to continue rusting. The ships could now be bought for a mere \$10 each, but even at that price there were no takers. At the Maritime Administration's headquarters in Washington, D.C., people recognized the absurdity of the situation and could laugh about it. All they could do was hope for congressional funding to pay for the scrapping of the ships.

Meanwhile, the Navy was proceeding with its four-ship, \$13.3 million pilot project. Dockside at Baltimore Marine Industries the next day I visited a small frigate named the *Patterson* that was being meticulously dismantled by a crew of fifty-four specialists working under the close supervision of a former Navy diver, who informed me, when I asked about the schedule and cost, that safety and a clean environment were his main concerns. His ship had space-suited workers, positive-pressure filtered ventilation, sealed hazardous-materials bins, color-coded placards, and micron socks hanging from the scuppers to purify the rainwater that drained from its immaculate decks. I realized I was in the presence of a shipbreaking pioneer. He understood the ethical need to spend millions more on a useless ship than its steel was worth. He consulted with chemists, liaison people, and all sorts of engineers. He shared information openly with his competitors, and expected them to do the same. He enforced a wide range of regulations, and fairly. He worked well with unions. He even took time to respect the memory of the *Patterson*'s sailors. His shipbreaking mission was so righteous it was practically Calvinistic.

That was true of Greenpeace's mission too. But there was a strange reversal. The U.S. Navy for once was concentrating on its own local problem, while Greenpeace was insisting that it had a mandate from "the global society" and "citizens of this planet." Words like those can come across as direct threats of

conquest—all the more so in weak and uncertain places like the impoverished parts of India that are already suffering from the disengagement of the elites.

I don't think Claire Tielens worried about such sensitivities. She told me that she had chosen her path because she wanted to fight injustice. She was a true idealist. But she did not feel reluctant to say "The recycling of toxic waste is such a hazardous activity that you cannot leave it to a developing country to do that. People say 'Why don't we export our knowledge

ALANG AND the industries that have sprung from it provide a livelihood, however meager, for perhaps as many as a million Indians. But for an even greater number of foreigners, Alang is a symbol of Western complicity and Third World hell.

and technology, and they can improve their conditions, and everything will be fine.' But nothing will be fine, because it's not just a matter of know-how and technology. Because to successfully export our environmental knowledge to India, you would also have to export the whole way society is organized." She was right about that, of course. But whereas others might hesitate over the implications of such ideas, she was not about to question the Greenpeace crusade. Her terms were unconditional: if she had her way, India would have to lose.

WHAT Greenpeace wants from shipbreaking must seem in the tidy confines of Holland to be perfectly fair—essentially, to treat shipping as if it were any other orderly industry, and to hold it responsible for its toxic by-products and the safety of its workers. The problem is that shipping is like the larger world in which it operates—an inherently disorderly affair, existing mostly beyond the reach of nations and their laws, beyond the dikes and coastal horizons, and out across the open seas. It is not exactly a criminal industry, but it is an amoral and stubbornly anarchic one. And it admits as much about itself: at last June's shipbreaking conference in Amsterdam one of the all-important London-based maritime insurers raised the fear that if somehow the reforms go through, even assuming they apply only to the most visible European shippers, there will be a corresponding increase in mysterious sinkings.

But others in the business told me that the more likely effect of the reforms, as long as money can be made in Third World scrap, would simply be a new and less direct route to Asia: ships would pass through more hands, would maybe live longer plying faraway waters under new names and flags, and would still end up dying on some filthy beach. Such changes are already happening, though it will be a year or more before Greenpeace's campaign results in any new laws in the European Union and at the International Maritime Organization.

There is evidence that some European shippers have begun to find new foreign buyers for vessels that they would normally have sold directly to scrappers, and Shell has recently decided to re-inspect and retain certain aging tankers rather than face the wrath of Greenpeace again. Paradoxically, such policies may lead to an increase in hull failures and spills—currently a big problem on the oceans. The lovely coast of Brittany will suffer for many years because of the loss of the *Erika*—a decrepit Maltese-registered tanker, overdue for scrapping, that broke in two off Brest last winter. Greenpeace protested the lax enforcement of European port controls—to good effect. But on the scale of the world, shipping is terribly difficult to police.

Few observers seriously believe that as a result of Western pressures, South Asia as a whole will now lose the scrapping business. But this offers little solace to the scrappers at Alang, because there is serious competition *within* the region, especially from Bangladesh. At Chittagong starvation wages are paid and labor and safety regulations are utterly lacking, so a shipbreaker can send a thousand barefoot men to tear apart a single vessel and scrap even a supertanker in six months. Bangladesh is not so much a nation as a condition of distress, and any attempt to regulate the industry there would obviously be futile. As a result of this commercial advantage, the Bangladeshis can pay top dollar for ships. During my stay at Alang such international competition had forced the bidding level for scrap ships above the price necessary to break even within India, and the scrappers currently acquiring vessels were having to gamble on a significant rise in the Indian metal market. It was a dangerous time.

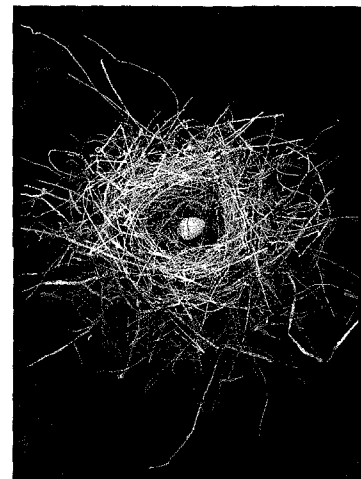
Pravin Nagarsheth was not sanguine about Alang's prospects. He worried that the Indian beach had been singled out for special criticism, and that the publicity of the Greenpeace campaign was exacerbating the existing competitive pressures. There was evidence, he said, that some of the biggest shippers had begun quietly to shy away from India entirely, and to direct their ships to more discreet beaches. He worried also about the process within India whereby the European campaign seemed to be changing domestic attitudes toward Alang—a change that in the end may prove more threatening to the work there than the eventual enactment of foreign laws. Either way, Nagarsheth wanted me to know how little it would take to destroy Alang.

Jaysukh Bai, the boss of Plot 138, was a relief to me, because he seemed almost unaware that his work might be considered wrong. He was a simple man, who knew the mechanics of the trade. As if I might not have heard, he said, "There are certain Western lobbies who are interested that shipbreaking not continue." But he never once mentioned any concern for safety or the environment. He never once mentioned his workers. He said, "I am worried about the future. What is important is the turnaround time. If there are too many rules to comply with, we will waste time." It was a statement of fact, hard to argue

with. I asked him how many ships he had broken. He counted on his fingers, because he remembered every one. Eventually he answered: thirty-eight. He told me they included the biggest ship ever grounded at Alang, a French supertanker of 52,000 tons. Those were the good old days. With that ship Captain Pandey must have had great fun.

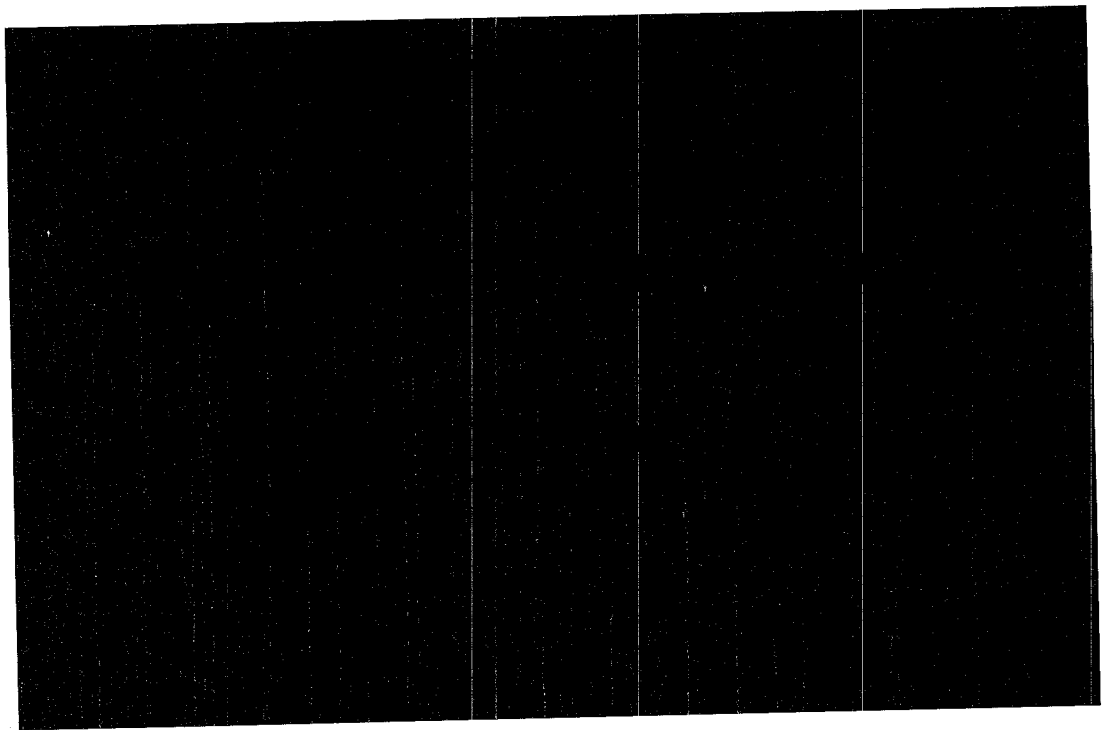
The one here now, the old *Sun Ray* from the Maldives, was only 15,000 tons, but it seemed very big to me. Jaysukh Bai told me he could do the job on it, start to finish, in a mere four months. That was very fast, and he may have been bragging. But only one month into it the superstructure and fuel tanks had been cut up and hauled away, and the lightened hull was being winched forward on the high tides and consumed with voracious efficiency. Even the birds joined in, pecking through the debris along the waterline, as alert as any man on the shore to the shreds of opportunity—a shard of torn plywood, pieces of wire for nest building, splinters of steel. I went down to the ship when I could, past the ground crews who by now had grown used to my presence. At the torn bow I climbed through the broken bilge into the huge forward cargo hold, now open to the sky. The ship was mine to wander—up precarious ladders to the main deck high above, through passageways and equipment rooms where the peeling paint and rusted steel gave evidence of the years of wandering and hard use, and ultimately of neglect. Nonetheless, I felt a sort of awe, and was never in a hurry to leave. After climbing back down from the main deck into the hold, I sometimes walked deeper still into the depths of the ship. It was eerie and dim on the inside, an immense man-made cavern filled with hoarse warning cries, the hiss of torches, sparks, smoke, heavy hammering, the sound of falling debris. It had paths made of narrow beams with oil-slick footing, and sudden gaping holes that seemed to emerge out of nowhere. If you fell there, you could certainly die. But after the glare and heat outside, it was also pleasantly cool. The workers did not seem to mind my presence, or even to wonder about it.

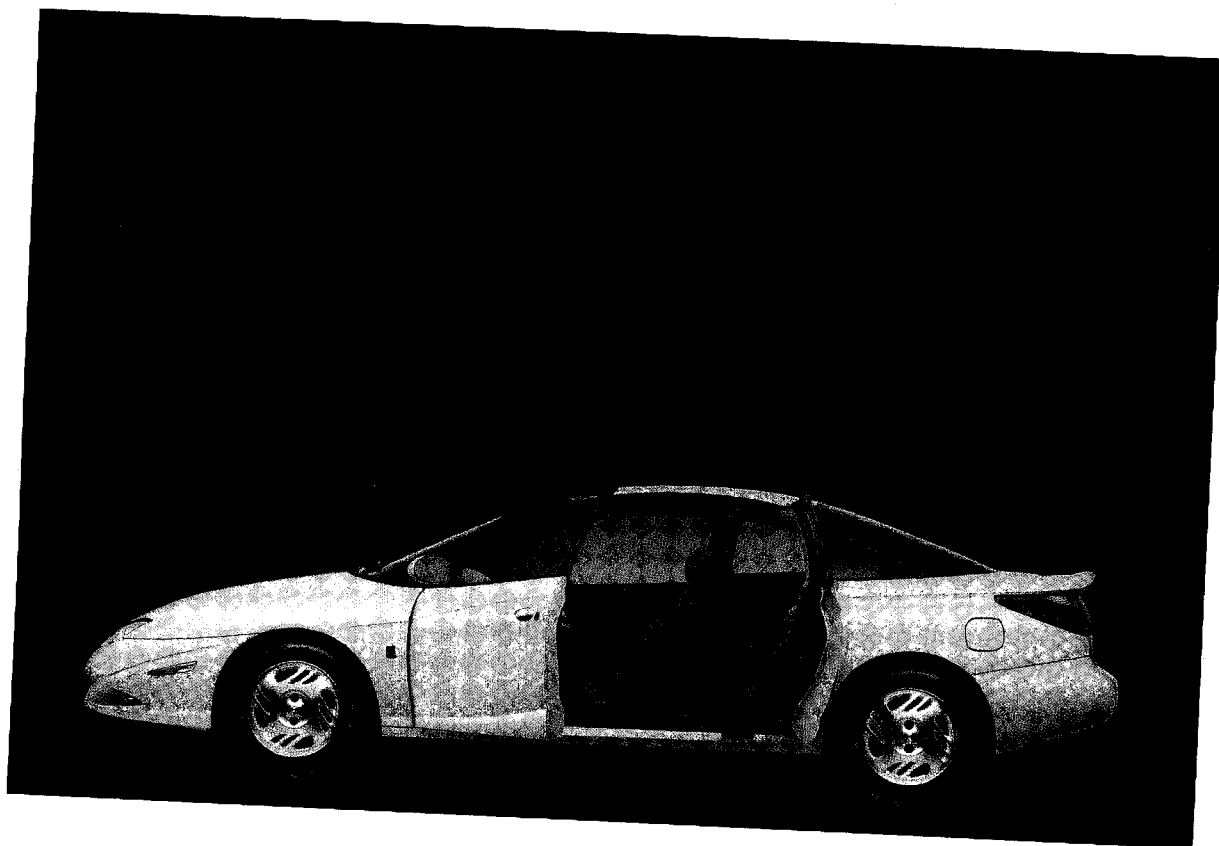
They appeared sometimes like ghosts, moving fast and in file without speaking. They were very dirty. They were very poor. But they lacked the look of death that I had seen on the men in the Bhavnagar re-rolling mill. They were purposeful. Toward the stern, where sunlight streamed through rough-cut ventilation holes and struck the oil-blackened walls, the towering engine room had the Gothic beauty of a cathedral. ☸



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*The photographs on pages 31, 33, 34–35, 42, and 47 were taken in Alang, India.
The photographs on pages 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 46, and 49 were taken in Chittagong, Bangladesh.*





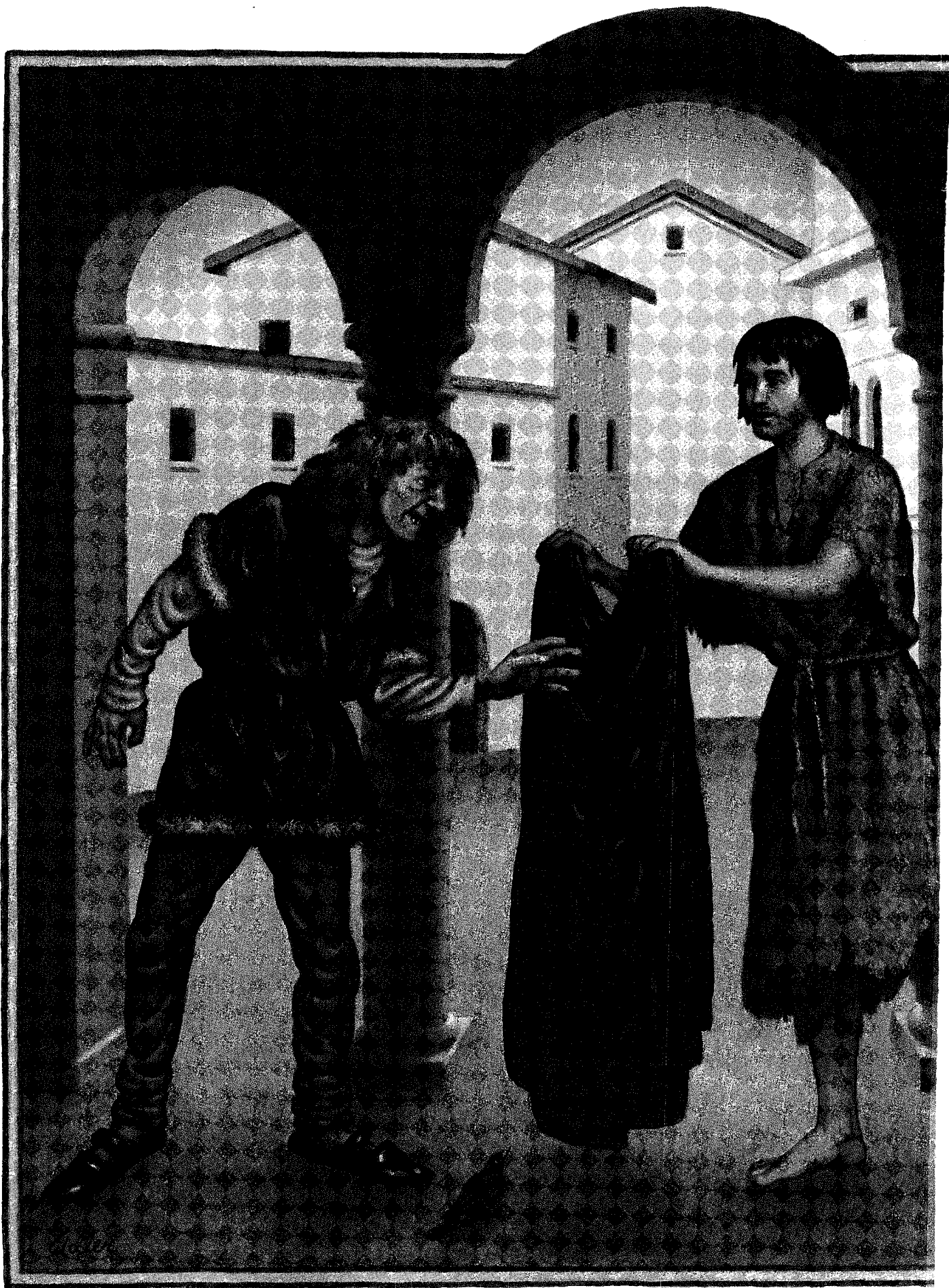
THE REDESIGNED 2001 THREE-DOOR COUPE

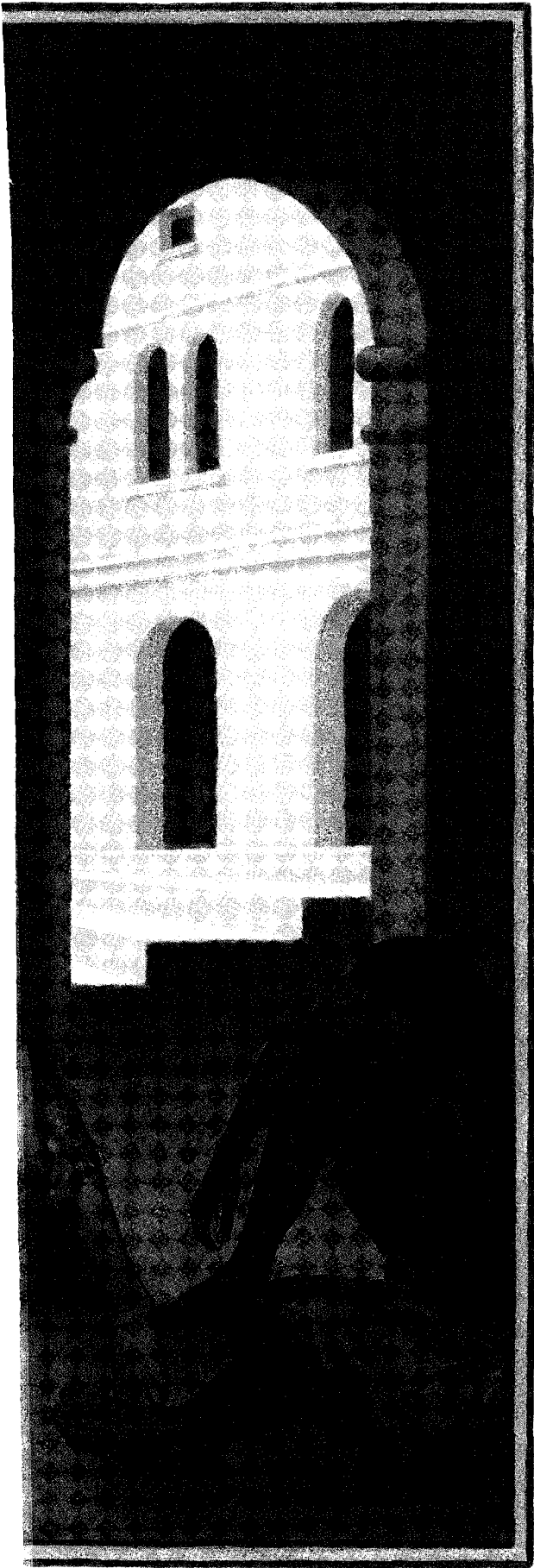
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Being Saint Francis

by VALERIE MARTIN

*Scenes from the discomfiting life
of Francis of Assisi*

A genuine first-hand religious experience . . . is bound to be a heterodoxy to its witnesses, the prophet appearing as a mere lonely madman. If his doctrine prove contagious enough to spread to any others, it becomes a definite and labeled heresy. But if it then still prove contagious enough to triumph over persecution, it becomes itself an orthodoxy; and when a religion has become an orthodoxy, its day of inwardness is over: the spring is dry; the faithful live at second hand exclusively and stone the prophets in their turn.

—William James,
The Varieties of Religious Experience

Introduction

WHEN SAINT FRANCIS—San Francesco—lay dying, he asked to be moved from the bishop's residence in Assisi to the chapel at the Portiuncula, a distance of about two miles outside the city walls. As they passed the city gates, he bid the friars carrying him to set him down on the road so that he might say a final farewell to the place of his birth. "This town," he began, "has the worst reputation in the whole region as the home of every kind of rogue and scoundrel." Then he begged God to bless the place and to make it the home of all who sincerely honored his name.

According to a contemporary brochure put out by the commune's busy tourist agency, Assisi is a city that cannot just be "seen"; it must be "experienced" as a place, perhaps *the* place, where "the spirit of St. Francis pervades all." Every year hundreds of thousands of visitors, art lovers, tourists, and pilgrims from all

over the world flock to see the famous basilica where the saint is buried. The narrow streets in which Francesco begged for bread are lined with hundreds of shops selling all manner of atrocious trinkets and some of the worst food to be found in Italy, at prices as breathtaking as the view from the Rocca Maggiore, the late-medieval fortress that glowers over the prosperous, crowded town. The spirit that pervades these streets is the same one that whistled down the stone staircases and across the Piazza del Commune in Francesco's lifetime, the same spirit that drove him straight into the outspread arms of Jesus Christ: the cold, relentless, insatiable, furious spirit of commerce.

Francesco di Pietro Bernardone was born in Assisi, toward the end of 1181, to a wealthy cloth merchant, Pietro Bernardone, and his wife, Pica, who may or may not have been French. He had an ordinary childhood, helping his father at his business and attending the church school near his house, where he was an unremarkable student. He grew to be a lively young man, fond of music and parties, given to romantic tales, dreams of knighthood, fantastical treasure quests, but also to prayer in solitary chapels. During one such occasion, at the dilapidated Church of San Damiano, God spoke to him from a crucifix, bidding him to repair the church. Francesco took some bolts of cloth from his father's warehouse, sold them, and delivered the money to the priest who lived there to pay for the repair of the chapel. Pietro, enraged by his son's extravagance, brought a complaint against him, which was resolved in the public square of Assisi. When the bishop gave Francesco the money and advised him to return to his father what was his, Francesco declared, "My Lord Bishop, not only will I gladly give back the money which is my father's, but also my clothes." He stripped off his clothes, placed the money on them, and standing naked before the bishop, his father, and all present, announced, "Listen, all of you, and mark my words. Hitherto I have called Pietro Bernardone my father; but because I am resolved to serve God, I return to him the money on account of which he was so perturbed, and also the clothes I wore which are his; and from now on I will say, 'Our Father who art in heaven,' and not 'Father Pietro Bernardone.'" The crowd wept in sympathy, and the bishop covered the naked and rebellious youth with his own cloak.

Francesco then took refuge in the poor church, where he devoted himself to making repairs; he begged for food and oil on the streets of Assisi. His former neighbors mocked him and drove him away, but one rich young man, Bernardo of Quintavalle, impressed by Francesco's sincerity and evident contentment in his new life, decided to join him. Together the two men gave away all of Bernardo's money and possessions to the poor.

More followers joined them. When they numbered twelve, the group walked to Rome to ask the Pope to approve a rule by which they might live as liegemen of the Church. After a dream in which he saw the Lateran Basilica collapsing and Francesco holding it up, the Pope, Innocent III, gave them an oral and very conditional approval.

Francesco's brotherhood, the *Fratres Minores*, grew rapidly. Within a few years the original twelve had grown to 5,000 (in comparison, the Dominican order, the Friars Preachers, as they were known, founded at roughly the same time, had fewer than fifty friars by 1220). They met each year during the feast of Pentecost for chapter meetings at the Portiuncula, a wooded area owned by local Benedictine monks and leased to the friars for one basket of fish a year. At these meetings Francesco delivered various admonitions; the friars were assigned to different regions; the *custos*, or caretakers, and ministers were appointed; and problems of administration were addressed. Between meetings the mission of the *fratres* was to wander homeless over the world, preaching repentance, begging for their food, offering themselves as servants to all. This, they believed, was the way the early Apostles had lived, the way Jesus had adjured all his followers to live—giving the world an example of virtue, loving poverty, making no preparations for the next meal or the next bed, but leaving everything to God.

A Rich Young Man on the Road



IN THE MORNING, when he leaves Foligno, on the last leg of his journey from Rome to Assisi, Francesco's horse plods along at a steady pace, requiring neither guidance nor urging. Francesco is in no hurry, for his home has none of the charms of the adventure he brings to a close with his return. Everyone will want to hear about what he has seen; even his father will listen to his descriptions of Rome, the city of wonders, of the towers and bridges, the palace of the Laterano, and all the shrines and sacred relics he visited. But he will not mention the event that most fired his imagination, because anyone who hears of it will say it was a shameful, foolish exploit, the folly of a wealthy and useless young man who hasn't the sense to appreciate his position. Suppose, his father would exclaim, just suppose some neighbor from Assisi had recognized him. How could he hold his head up in the town?

Something has been coming to him now for some time. He cannot be sure what it is or when it began, but he can feel it moving toward him, gathering momentum. His dreams are full of triumph; voices speak to him and counsel him, showing him scenes of great glory and making a promise: All this will be yours. But when he is awake, there are no triumphs, though he is free to indulge himself in whatever pursuits and amusements his father's money can buy. Nothing obstructs him; no one contradicts him. When he made up his mind to visit the holy places in Rome, he met with no objections. His mother provided him with a pouch full of bread and sweets, and his father encouraged him to take the better of their horses; both parents were anxious that his clothes be the finest and that he carry enough silver to make proper offerings at the shrines.

His horse shakes his head, as if to remind Francesco that he has at least some small obligations as a rider, and he comes to himself with a start. It is a spring day of stunning perfection; the air is cool and fresh, the sky overhead as blue as the mantle of the Holy Virgin, and on either side of the road the fields stretch away pleasantly, olive trees on one side, grain on the other, bordered by ranks of cypress and pine. There are contingents of chaffinches chirping in the dusty leaves of the olive trees, and swallows whirling overhead in undulating formations, like fallen leaves twisting and turning in a stream. He passes two peasants digging mud by the side of the road and another leading a reluctant goat by a bit of dirty rope. They glance at him as he goes by, a rich young man, carefree, and they give terse responses to his friendly salutations. The goat gives a strangled cry, struggling at the end of his rope while his owner curses and threatens him. Francesco looks away, wounded, as he always is by displays of pointless ferocity. He has seen too many the past few days in Rome, where men and beasts are crowded together and tempers flare at the most innocent remark. At the Basilica of San Pietro he saw two men fighting on the very steps, and later, when he came out, there was such a quantity of blood, though no sign of the combatants, that he thought one had surely killed the other. And it was there, as he stood looking around nervously, that a voice called out to him from the shadows of the vestibule, and the peculiar and wonderful adventure began.

"Have you given it all to the thieving priests?" the voice inquired. "Or is there a coin to spare for those that may truly have need of it?"

Francesco stepped away from the blood soaking into the paving stones and approached the man—if he was a man, for all he could see of him was one bare foot, so swollen and bruised that it looked more like a rotten vegetable than human flesh. "I have not given it all," he said, stepping in under the arch. He could see nothing, for the bright daylight had dazzled his eyes and now the shadows confounded them, but he heard the harsh laughter of several men. One of them said, "Here is the last honest man in the world," and another responded, "It proves what I have been telling you, that the Judgment Day is near, for here is the new Christ among us to prove it."

"And the Pope is the Antichrist," the first speaker declared. Francesco gazed down at them as his eyes became accustomed to the dark. There were three of them; two were old fellows, or so they appeared. The third, the one who had announced the imminence of the Judgment Day, was a youth of perhaps Francesco's age with thick blond hair, scarcely any beard, and an open, ingenuous expression. He looked Francesco up and down with a bold, rapacious eye. "Now, that's a fine cloak such as only a nobleman could afford," he observed.

"I am not a nobleman," Francesco replied. "But my father is a cloth merchant."

The young man got to his feet awkwardly, pressing his hands against the wall behind him. When he was halfway up, he hopped forward onto his one good leg. The other was stunt-

ed and shriveled. He could put his weight on this leg long enough to make a quick step; he crossed the space with a rolling, out-of-kilter gait, and then propped himself against the wall. "Wouldn't I look a prince in such a cloak as that?" he said, smiling up into Francesco's face. His lower right teeth were missing, and when he smiled, his lower lip fell in over the gap.

"For the love of God," one of the old men said, "give us a coin if you won't give us the cloak."

Francesco turned to look at the speaker, narrowing his eyes to make him out in the shadows, crouched beside his friend, who rubbed his face with his palms and echoed, "Yes, give us a coin, for the love of God."

"For the love of God," Francesco said.

He looked into the eyes of the ragged young man who imagined no greater glory than to have such a cloak as his. "Will you trade your clothes for mine?" he said. In reply the youth gave a hoot of delight. The old men cackled together; here was an odd business. "Will you let me sit here with you?" Francesco continued, as he pulled off his cloak, his doublet, his leather girdle. The young man began stripping off his rags, which took no time at all, because he wore only a short sackcloth tunic and a pair of filthy breeches embroidered with holes. "I will have to take my other clothes back when I go," Francesco explained, examining the contents of his purse, "but I will leave you my cloak and all but two of these coins; I will need that much for my journey home."

"Giuseppe is right," one of the old men remarked. "This proves that God's judgment is nigh on this world."

Francesco laughed. Half-naked, he bent over to pull off his leggings. Giuseppe had already donned his shirt. "And will you share your food with me?" Francesco asked. This sent them all into a riot of laughter. "Oh, yes," they agreed. Giuseppe slid down the wall to the stones, clutching his new cloak, which he had bundled in his arms like a baby. "You are welcome to everything we have," he announced, with the casual grace and courtesy of a lord offering hospitality to some bedraggled traveler.

Francesco stayed with them all day, and the people who saw him took him for one of the beggars. What was this sensation, so delicious and unexpected, when a passing lady paused to look down at him with a haughty yet pitying eye? As he stretched out his hand to her, she turned away, drawing her heavy skirt in close, lest he should touch it. Did she thank heaven that no son of hers would ever be found in such disgraceful circumstances? And what would she say if she knew that this importuning beggar was a sham, deserving neither charity nor pity, for he had a horse, a purse, and fine clothes, and would return in a day or two to his father's comfortable house, where a servant would greet him at the door?

When evening came, two more men joined the group, and they all sat down in the street to share the food they had begged. It was poor stuff, black bread and a little grain, which they made into a porridge, for one of them owned an iron pot,

and another had begged some sticks of firewood. Francesco listened to their lively conversation, full of profanity and derision for the vanity of the world. Though he was wealthy, they included him, as if he, too, did not know when he would find a meal again. After they had eaten, he changed back into his own clothes and laughed with them over the miracle of his transformation. Yet he felt an aching, premonitory sadness as the crisp linen settled across his shoulders; it was as though he were putting on a costume that would deceive only a fool, for a wise man would see at once that it did not suit him, that it must belong to some other man, an elegant, stylish young man, and that Francesco was an impostor in his own clothes. He folded his cloak and laid it in Giuseppe's lap, accepting his enthusiastic blessing and the boisterous farewells of the others, who promised him their hospitality whenever he should return. Then, bowing and waving as they repeatedly called his name, he wandered out into the dark streets alone.

Now he is himself again, but not himself; something has changed, and the world looks different because of it. He has acquired, among other novelties, a memory he will not share. His horse carries him back over the same road he traveled before. His senses are open; he is prey to sudden and conflicting emotions. He sees himself from the outside, and he is not entirely gratified by what he sees.

LACHRYMALS

Some Roman women saved their tears in them.

They held flat narrow-necked heart-shaped delicate phials

Below their eyelids against each cheek in turn

And caught their tears. No one could shed enough

In a single spasm to fill that tiny hollow,

So the women stoppered them with glass teardrops

And waited. In the meanwhile, some wore them

Like pendants to have that smooth translucent glass

(The colors of changing light on the hills)

Nearby all day and all night: none could be certain

When grief or pain or a sudden abundance

Of sorrow might come welling into their eyes

Again. When they were full to the brim,

Some women carried them as charms

Of remembrance through their lives

And into their tombs, and some would pour them out

Into quiet streams or onto the bare earth

And walk away, and some would drink them.

—DAVID WAGONER

The Leper



IS BACK IS STIFF and sore from days of riding and from the long rounds of the shrines. He shrugs his shoulders, attempting to shake out the soreness, and rolls his head in a slow circle, easing the knotted muscles in his neck. As he does this, his horse

starts, making a panicked sidestep that nearly unseats him. He catches up the reins as he lifts himself out of the saddle and then, when he drops back into his seat, he loosens his knees, gripping the horse's flanks with his calves. He knows as he goes through these automatic calming responses that there is something in the road just ahead, something that was not there a moment ago. The horse comes to a standstill in a cloud of dust that rises to his knees, and he stands working his head back and forth against the bit. Francesco rests a hand on his mane and says his name softly, reassuringly, as he looks down past the foaming lips to see what has so terrified this normally sedate and reliable creature.

The leper stands in the middle of the road, perfectly still. One hand rests on the bell cord around his neck, the other hangs limply at his side. He is dressed in a filthy garment, patched together from bits of sacking and undyed wool, which hangs loosely on his emaciated body. He regards Francesco and his horse steadily, his head slightly turned and his chin lifted, the better to see them, for his disease has eaten away half his face and he has only one eye.

Francesco does not speak. He cannot move. They face each other on the road, and the bright sun pours down great quantities of light over them, so there are no shadows anywhere, nothing to soften or dim the harsh reality of this encounter, and nowhere to hide from the necessity of playing it out. The leper's eye drills into Francesco. From childhood he has had a horror of lepers, and he has always avoided the *lazaretto* at the foot of Mount Subasio, where they sometimes congregate in the road, rattling their wooden bells and calling out for alms. He dreams of the foul stench rising from their rotting flesh, their grotesque faces, their phlegmy, guttural voices. He wakes sweating and shouting for help.

He glances back down the road and into the neat ranks of the olive trees. All is uncommonly empty and still. Even the birds, twittering only a moment ago, have been silenced.

He could ride on. There is no reason to stop. He could throw down his last coin to the leper as he passes. His horse lifts one hoof and paws the hard dirt. It is time to go on, to go home. As Francesco drops his hand to the reins, his eyes fall on his own well-fitting glove, and it dawns on him that this leper is not wearing gloves, which is odd, because he and his kind are required always to wear them when they leave their hospitals, just as they are required always to wear and ring their bells to warn unwary travelers of their approach.

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Again Francesco looks down on the solitary figure of the leper, who has not moved. His hand is wrapped around the cord, his head arrested at an angle. He is like a statue, lifeless and weather-beaten, and Francesco has the sudden sense that he has been standing there, in his path, forever.

Something has been coming toward him, or he has been coming to something; he has known this for some time, and he has bent his energy in the direction of finding out what it might be. This was the reason for his pilgrimage to Rome. At the shrines he had recited the requisite prayers; gazed upon the relics, the bones, the bits of hair and cloth, the vials of blood and tears; and proffered the proper offerings. But he had not felt the burden of his sins lifted, and this spiritual restlessness drove him on. Only when he was with the beggars in the vestibule of the basilica had he felt some respite from this condition of tense and urgent expectancy.

He is in the grip of it again as he swings one leg over the saddle and drops to the ground beside his horse. The stillness of the world makes every sound acute—the clinking of the bridle chain as he leads the animal to a green patch nearby, the sound of grass tearing, and then the big jaws grinding. Francesco runs his hands through his hair, bats the dust from the front of his surcoat, and turns to face the man, who is there waiting for him.

The leper watches him with interest. His blasted face is bathed in sunlight; the black hole that was his eye has a steely sheen, and a few moist drops on his scab-encrusted lips glitter like precious stones. He moves at last, releasing his cord and extending his hand slowly, palm up, before him.

This supplicating gesture releases Francesco, for it dictates the countergesture, which he realizes he longs to make. Without hesitation he strides across the distance separating him from his obligation, smiling all the while as if stepping out to greet an old and dear friend. He opens his purse, extracts the thin piece of silver inside it, and closes it up again. He is closer now than he has ever before been to one of these unfortunate beings, and the familiar reaction of disgust and nausea rises up, nearly choking him, but he battles it down. He can hear the rasp of the leper's breath, rattling and wet. The battle between Francesco's will and his innate reluctance overmasters him: he misses a step, recovers, and then drops to one knee before the outstretched hand, which is hardly recognizable as a hand but is, rather, a lumpish, misshapen thing, the fingers so swollen and callused that they are hardly differentiated, the flesh as black and hard as an animal's rough paw.

Carefully Francesco places his coin in the open palm, where it glitters, hot and white. For a moment he tries to form some simple speech, some pleasantry that will restore him to the ordinary world, but even as he struggles, he understands that this world is gone from him now, that there is no turning back. It was only so much smoke, blinding and confusing him, but he has come through it somehow; he has found the source of it, and now, at last, he is standing in the fire. Tenderly he takes the leper's hand, tenderly he brings it to his lips. At once his

mouth is flooded with an unearthly sweetness that pours over his tongue, burning his throat and bringing sudden tears to his eyes. These tears moisten the corrupted hand he presses to his mouth. His ears are filled with the sound of wind, and he can feel the wind chilling his face, a cold, harsh wind blowing toward him from the future, blowing away everything that has come before this moment—this moment he has longed for and dreaded, as if he thought he might not live through it.

He reaches up, clinging to the leper's tunic, for the wind is so strong and cold that he fears he cannot stand against it. Behind him the horse lifts its head from grazing and lets out a long, impatient whinny, but Francesco does not hear it. He is there in the road, rising to his feet, and the leper assists him, holding him by the shoulders. Then the two men clutch each other, their faces pressed close together, their arms entwined. The sun beats down and the air is hot and still, yet they appear to be caught in a whirlwind. Their clothes whip about; their hair stands on end; they hold on to each other for dear life.

In Hiding



E CAN HEAR THEIR voices, angry and exultant, over the terrified cries of their prisoners, like the shouts of butchers one to another when they are herding squealing, struggling pigs into the slaughtering pen. These captors are neither men nor beasts; in spite of their hairy backs, black horns, brutish snouts, and birds' feet, they stand upright and brandish in their large human hands the tools of their trade: lashes; slashing hooks; glowing, red-hot irons. One digs his talons into the neck of a naked man who writhes beneath him, his face swollen and blue, his body drawn up in an impossible arc. The man's mouth is opened wide in a howl, for his captor has forced a thick rod between his buttocks and is bearing down hard upon it. Behind these two a woman has fallen to her knees as she struggles to release her shoulder from the jaws of another demon. The creature's thick reptilian tail is wrapped around her torso, holding her fast against his thighs. He mocks her suffering, pointing out her destination: a black tube with teeth, like the mouth of an enormous serpent, down which two of his fellows have thrown another victim—whether male or female is uncertain, because only the legs and feet are visible. The feet are curiously flexed. All but two of the prisoners are naked: a man in rich garb, carrying a sack across his shoulders and entering the awful scene through a flaming gate at one side, and another man crawling on the ground near the serpent's mouth, naked but for the bishop's miter still firmly in place on his head, his torso wrapped tightly in the coiled tail of another demon. The bishop is gazing at another man, who has a demon crouched on his stomach. The creature is positioned so that his buttocks are poised just over his victim's face; his sharp

talons are sunk in the man's genitals. The sufferer's mouth is held open by an iron device, and his eyes are rolled back in agony and horror. From the demon's anus flows a stream of gold coins, filling the open mouth, choking the man with gold.

Francesco lets out a soft huff of amusement as he examines this last image. He looks up from the dark and lurid sufferings of the damned to the bright sunlit window next to him, but he does not notice the limpidity of the light that illuminates the book and the table he is bending over, because he hears the sound of footsteps on the gravel outside. Hurriedly he crosses the room and drops down into an open recess in the floor, a space so narrow and shallow that he has to curl himself in a ball to fit into it. He reaches up to slide the flat stone that serves as a lid for this, his own personal hell, into place, closing his eyes tight against the dirt that always showers down when the stone's edge lodges in the earth.

The door has opened, the intruder has paused, and then the footsteps come purposefully to the hiding place. Two sharp raps bring down a fresh shower of dirt. Francesco pushes against the stone, lifting it, while his friend grabs the edge and pulls it back across the floor. Francesco sits up in his hole and rubs the dirt from his eyes.

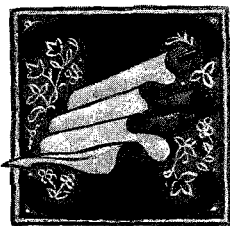
"Your father has not relented," the old priest says. "He knows you are in hiding hereabouts, and he has sworn to find you if he has to pay the entire guard."

"He won't have to pay anyone," Francesco says flatly.

The priest throws up his hands. "What will you do?"

"I'm going to Assisi," Francesco says. "He will find me in the street easily enough."

Ingrate, Thief, Scoundrel



INSIDE THE GATES of Assisi two boys, returning from the forest, each burdened by a large dead hare, push past Francesco, and he is so weak that he staggers into the wall. Their heads come up like those of young wolves alerted by the misstep of a sheep, their eyes fix coldly upon him, and their nostrils quiver, testing the air, deciphering the scent of vulnerability and fear. "Idiot," one observes to the other. Francesco rights himself and continues up the street, holding the skirt of his tunic so that he will not trip on it. The boys fall into step behind him. Each is half his size but has twice his strength. "You know who this is," one says to the other. "This is the son of Pietro Bernardone, the one who has robbed his father and disgraced his name." Francesco plods on, his eyes on the paving stones rising ahead of him.

"Why have you come back, madman?" one of the boys taunts him. "Do you think your father will welcome you?" The other steps up quickly, overtaking Francesco and dancing out ahead of him, brandishing his hare. He squeezes his nose with his free hand and whines, "God, how he stinks."

"He stinks of his friends at the *lazaretto*," his companion offers. "He is searching for his new love among the lepers." At this Francesco looks briefly over his shoulder, his expression a mixture of exhaustion, fever, and irony. The boy feels the hot black arrow of this regard as a momentary hesitation, instantly banished by the arrival of a boisterous trio clattering down the steps from San Giorgio. They are just released from school and wild from a morning of Latin declensions, intent now on merriment or mischief, whichever comes easiest. At once they spy Francesco and his persecutors and rush forward to join in the game, shouting imprecations—"Idiot," "Swine," "Thief," "Madman." Circling Francesco, they pluck at his sleeves, bump him hard with their hips and elbows, mock his efforts to keep his footing and to continue on his way. His resistance is feeble and he does not protest, which excites their contempt. They speak for him, grinning and winking at one another, "Oh, do not push me so, my dear Giorgio." "Matteo, why are you so rough with me?" The racket brings women to the upper windows along the street. "It is Pietro Bernardone's son," one observes to another. Like a feather riding on the air, this phrase is borne away along the streets, fluttering across the piazza at San Giorgio, sucked into the narrow passageway and puffed out across the marketplace, where the stalls are closing for the day. Old women, trudging homeward with their baskets half empty—summer is over, and already there is little to buy but turnips, apples, and quinces—lift their sharp faces to hear the news: "Pietro's son, Francesco, has come back."

As Francesco makes his way through the town, the mocking entourage thickens around him, and he can scarcely see what is ahead. The children pick up stones and clods of dirt, which they pitch at him, shouting with delight when they hit their mark. He plods on, indifferent to all provocation; but when they pass the ancient columns of Minerva's temple, the press in front of him suddenly parts, and he is faced with a sight that weakens his knees, though not his resolve. His father rushes toward him, bellowing, cursing, calling on God and on all his neighbors to witness his disgrace and his fury. His face is bright red, his eyes bulge in their sockets, his lips are pulled back over his teeth like an enraged dog's. Francesco stands his ground, but at the last, as his father charges down on him, he throws up his hands to protect his face.

"Ingrate!" Pietro shouts, grabbing his son by the hair. "Thief! Scoundrel!" He knocks Francesco to his knees with a backhanded blow and then jerks him up and slaps him across the ear. Francesco does not struggle or cry out. He has been living in a hole for a month, refining his courage for this confrontation, and though the father has superior strength, the son's will has been formed as igneous rock is formed, under pressure, and it is unyielding.

The crowd now takes the side of youth against age, and chides Pietro for his anger. This criticism stings him, and he protests vociferously. How could they know what he has been through day after day, with this good-for-nothing boy who claims he has God's blessing to steal from his own father? He

grips Francesco by the elbow and pulls him forward so roughly that he feels the sinew pop at Francesco's shoulder, but he will not be stopped now. If his son resists, he will take his arm right out of the socket. Francesco reels, his eyes roll back in his head, and he stumbles forward, endeavoring to keep up. Pietro rains down curses on his son, on his neighbors, on his town, on the world, on God himself, who has cursed him with the infamy of an ungrateful son.

The Friar and the Pope



HEY HAVE ARRIVED at the Lateran palace, a city within the city, and have made their way through the outer courts and inner vestibules to the great hall where the Lord Pope receives the never-ending tributes and entreaties of the horde that constitutes Jesus Christ's

Church on earth. Clerics and prelates, secretaries and legates, lords and guildsmen, each in the costume suitable to his condition and rank, occupy themselves with the ceremonies required to command for even one moment the sublime attention of His Holiness. Bishop Guido guides Francesco and his brothers through the crowd, exchanging a word with a guard here and a secretary there, until they stand before a pair of doors as tall as trees, which open before them ponderously and with an impressive creaking of hinges, like the long-unopened gates of Paradise. They are herded inside by the bishop and passed along by a series of papal functionaries. The Lord Pope, seated at the far end of the great room on his high throne, leans forward to watch their approach. The babble of conversation does not entirely cease, but the volume drops appreciably as all eyes are gradually drawn to this ragged, uncouth, unwashed collection of bumpkins, whose bare feet slap the polished marble floors. Their small, dark, bright-eyed leader steps out ahead of them, his eagerness so barely contained that he seems to execute a bizarre new dance step as he charges forward. The Pope sends Cardinal Giovanni, who stands at his side, an incredulous and skeptical look: This is his discovery? This shabby, inelegant creature fresh from the sty? This is his idea of what the Church will require if it is to stem the flood of heresy and dissension that is washing down from the north? Truly, God's wonders have not ceased.

When Francesco reaches the foot of the steps leading to the Pope's throne, his progress is checked by a terse command from a guard. He looks up to Cardinal Giovanni, who nods at him distantly. He sweeps back the skirt of his patched and unsightly tunic as if it were the robe of an emperor and inclines his head and shoulders in a lordly bow. He can hear the cardinal's introduction: "Here is our Brother Francesco di Pietro Bernardone of Assisi, whom I have examined, and who begs the ear of Your Holiness." Francesco keeps his head down but raises his eyes and looks directly into the Lord Pope's opaque

and chilly scrutiny. The Pope's golden corona is studded with jewels, and it rises like the dome of a gleaming beehive high above his head. The rigid collar of his cope is so high that it obscures the lower part of his face, so he appears to be a small mound of gold, brocade, and jewels from which peer steadily two heavy-lidded, skeptical eyes above a long aquiline nose. As Francesco stares, uncertain whether to speak, genuflect, or back cautiously away, the folds of the cope rustle, and a small, pale hand appears, the index finger extended, pointing at him. Then the finger crooks once in a summoning gesture. He casts an anxious look at the cardinal, who lifts his chin, reinforcing the Pope's command. Eagerly Francesco climbs the wide steps to the foot of the papal throne.

Francesco stands before the Lord Pope, nodding his head at something the cardinal is saying. Pope Innocent listens, his neck bent forward beneath the weight of his corona, his shoulders drooping beneath the weight of his robes. His gaze wanders from the cardinal to Francesco and then out to the brothers, huddled together nervously like dull sheep liable to panic and run off a cliff if their shepherd isn't quick about his business. He looks back at the shepherd in question, a dreamy fellow at best, full of enthusiasm, lacking judgment, doubtless barely literate, though Bishop Guido and Cardinal Giovanni have assured His Holiness that these penitents do much good in their district, nursing the poor and even the lepers, repairing churches, preaching repentance and, more important, respect for the Holy See. How much harm could they do if sanctioned, and how much more if refused? He presses his eyelids with his fingertips, listening to the cardinal, who seems determined to keep his protégé from speaking for himself.

The brothers have begun to feel more at ease and to look around curiously. Brother Egidio, gazing up into the gloom, makes a discovery, which he brings to the attention of Brother Angelo. Up there, on the capital of that column, can he see it? Angelo cranes his neck; he doesn't see anything. Then, as Egidio raises his arm to point, Angelo does see it. But what is it? Is it a sparrow or a wren? The bird hops from one marble leaf to another and then takes off in the direction of the doors. It is a sparrow. They follow its dizzy flight as it sails through the cloudy upper atmosphere of the room.

"It seems to me that your way of life is too hard," the Pope comments at last, addressing himself pointedly to Francesco, who smiles as if he expected just this objection, though he says not a word to refute it. Straightway the cardinal offers his unsolicited opinion, which is that it might cause painful and unnecessary misunderstandings among the laity if the Holy Father should decree that the way of life recommended in the Gospels is too difficult for a Christian to undertake. This is not, the Pope concedes, an insignificant point. And as he considers it, his gaze wanders again to the brothers huddled out there in the aisle—surely an unpromising lot. One of them is rubbing his eyes with two fists, like a sleepy child, and two others stand apart, gazing up at the ceiling with their mouths ajar, like simpletons in a field making fantastic pictures out of the clouds.

Stigmata



THE SHADOWS HAVE lengthened, and the night birds have begun their plaintive chorus. Brother Leone lights the lamp, adjusts the flame, and returns to his occupation, cutting long strips from a square of white wool. Francesco sits next to him on a stone, his hands resting palms up in his lap. Leone's method is to cut the edge and then rip the strips away. The repeated complaint of the tearing cloth is the only sound in the dim cell. Francesco dabs at his eye with the sleeve of his robe.

It is always worst on Saturday, because Francesco refuses to have his bandages changed on Friday, the day when the Lord Christ suffered on the cross. Leone has removed the cloths from his hands and feet without much difficulty, but they both know that the wound in his side is the most painful to clean, because it bleeds more copiously than the others. So they leave it for last. Leone lays out his strips, takes one up, and kneels at Francesco's feet. Because the nailhead protrudes from the flesh, he lays the strip beneath the iron, passing the cloth around the foot until it is level with the hard black disk. He does this carefully, gently. Moving the nail is excruciating to Francesco, though he never complains, only draws his breath in sharply.

When he has finished with Francesco's feet and hands, Leone helps him pull his tunic over his head, so that he can change the wide bandage that wraps his torso. Francesco groans as he lifts his arms, and Leone winces, apologizing for the pain. Francesco's fingers flutter around the waist of his breeches, touching the edge of the bandage. Leone bends over to inspect it. The blood has soaked through and dried.

Leone has confessed to Brother Rufino the anxiety in his heart when he thinks of his own sinful nature and how unworthy he is to serve so holy a man, yet he is convinced that only through the grace of Father Francesco has his poor soul any hope of salvation. God has chosen Francesco as his instrument to save many souls that would otherwise be damned, and Leone's most fervent prayer is that through no merit of his own but through his devotion to Francesco he will be one of that select company of the redeemed. Yet even as he nourishes that hope, he knows that he has no right to it, because he is so sinful and plagued by temptations.

Now, as he studies the bloodstained bandage, he feels a welling up of emotions: fear, pity, devotion, heart-smiting love. For a moment he does not move, and Francesco asks, "What is it, brother lamb of Christ?"

Leone shivers, drawing away. "It's dry," he says. "But when I unwrap it, it will open again."

Francesco straightens his spine and opens his arms out from his sides as if he were praying, and perhaps he is. Leone unfastens the end of the bandage and slowly pulls away the outer layer. It comes loose easily, but with the next layer he feels a

slight resistance, and Francesco's knitted brow tells him what he already knows. "Forgive me, Father," Leone says, pulling the cloth free with a quick jerk. Francesco bites his lower lip without speaking. There is one layer to go, and it will be the most painful. Leone brings the loose part of the bandage just to the edge of the wound, and then pulls it lightly to find the deepest part. Francesco's face has gone white, but he does not flinch. Instead he raises one hand and lays it on Leone's chest, just over his heart. "My dear son," he says softly.

Leone looks down at the bandaged hand pressing gently against his chest. The wonder of the moment overcomes him. Francesco's hand is like a burning sword plunged into his heart, inflaming him with such passionate devotion that his vision blurs and he gasps for air. How is it possible that he is here, tending the miraculous wounds of this new Christ, who is also his dearest friend and companion, his brother, father, and mother, who inspired him, when they were both young and in love with Lady Poverty, to follow him on a great adventure of the soul? They have walked a thousand miles in this quest, only to come to this cell, where Francesco touches Leone's heart with the hand that bears the proof that he is the most dearly loved of all those who serve the Lord Christ, because of all the saints only he has been chosen to share in Jesus Christ's own suffering.

"Francesco," Leone says, leaning into the hand that presses, that holds, his heart, and meeting his beloved's eyes, which, though they can scarcely see him, still pour forgiveness, love, and perfect understanding over him like warm rain. Brother Leone is swooning. He fears he will be destroyed by the power of this love. Yet his hands are still engaged in their task. With a cry of terror commingled with joy, he pulls sharply at the cloth, freeing it from the wounded flesh. As he loses consciousness, he sees the blood gushing forth, and it seems to him that his whole body and his soul are bathed and refreshed in this blood, which is shed for him, and which he cannot deserve.

Epilogue

SOME see the stigmata as the crowning achievement of Francesco's life, signaling his complete identification, and hence union, with his beloved Jesus Christ. Others suggest that there was an element of despair in the miracle—that Francesco saw himself as crucified by the unrest and infighting in the great movement he had founded. His contemporaries, though they had never heard of such a thing before, seem to have accepted it as well within the realm of possibility, and even in keeping with what they understood to be the nature of God's continual interference in the world of men. Francesco had, in their view, been singled out and marked by Jesus as his own. It proved what everyone already suspected—that he was a living saint. Two years later, in October of 1226, Francesco died peacefully at Assisi, revered by all, his devoted friars gathered around him. He was forty-five years old. ❧

THE QUEEN IS DEAD

by MICHAEL JOSEPH GROSS

*Once a gay icon,
Judy Garland has become an embarrassment*

ONE bright day last summer on Commercial Street in Provincetown, Massachusetts, Afrodite, a bald black drag queen with a silver stud in one nostril and big, muscular hairless legs, strode toward me, her eyes locked on the dust jacket of the book I was carrying: *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend* (1992), by David Shipman. “Judy Garland?” She sniffed imperiously. “You big queen.”

No one had ever called me a big queen before, and to my surprise, I kind of liked it. Such sissifying slaps carry historical punch for a gay man today. They mark him with the effeminacy that in previous generations was integral to the popular image of gay men—witty, frowsy, fussy old queens who memorized every minute of *All About Eve* and poured their hearts into antiques and opera and, perhaps most damnably of all, Judy Garland.



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Blatant effeminacy last seems to have been widely acceptable in (white, urban, middle-class) gay culture in the late 1960s, a time memorialized in Mart Crowley's 1968 play *The Boys in the Band*, which depicted the quip-lashed anguish and emotionally destructive conditions of life in the closet with unprecedented candor. Judy Garland's status as a mascot for that generation of gay men is signaled early on in the dialogue of Crowley's play ("What's more boring than a queen doing a Judy Garland imitation?" "A queen doing a Bette Davis imitation"), and the play's title is lifted from the dialogue of Garland's 1954 film *A Star Is Born*.

Some observers of gay life in the sixties go so far as to argue that Garland's death sparked the modern gay-rights movement; the Stonewall riots occurred in Manhattan's West Village just hours after her funeral, in New York in June of 1969. It's a provocative coincidence, but most scholars deny any causal relationship between the events. (Garland did have a loyal following among patrons of the Stonewall Inn. As Charles Kaiser explains in *The Gay Metropolis* [1997], the bar had no liquor license; it passed itself off as a bottle club,

bie & Fitch. Young gay men today just want to be regular guys—with better-than-average bodies.

It's easy to see why gay men might want to forget queenly stereotypes, particularly the stereotype of the Judy queen. In the late 1960s, when the mainstream media rarely acknowledged the existence of homosexuality, articles about Judy Garland sometimes functioned as vehicles for the aggressive derision of gay men. *Time*, in its August 18, 1967, review of Garland's final engagement at New York's Palace Theatre, observed, "A disproportionate part of her nightly claque seems to be homosexual. The boys in the tight trousers roll their eyes, tear at their hair and practically levitate from their seats, particularly when Judy sings ['Over the Rainbow']. In the same article *Time* quoted psychiatrists' interpretations of the gay-Garland connection. One offered that "Judy was beaten up by life, embattled and ultimately had to become more masculine. She has the power that homosexuals would like to have, and they attempt to attain it by idolizing her."

William Goldman described the final night of that Palace run in *Esquire*. He had seen "a young boy, maybe twenty-

Garland embodied many of the paradoxical emotional states that gay men commonly experience while coming out: vulnerability and strength, sincerity and duplicity, self-consciousness and abandon, adolescence and maturity.

requiring all its so-called members to sign in at the door. Many used pseudonyms, of which "Judy Garland" was among the most popular.)

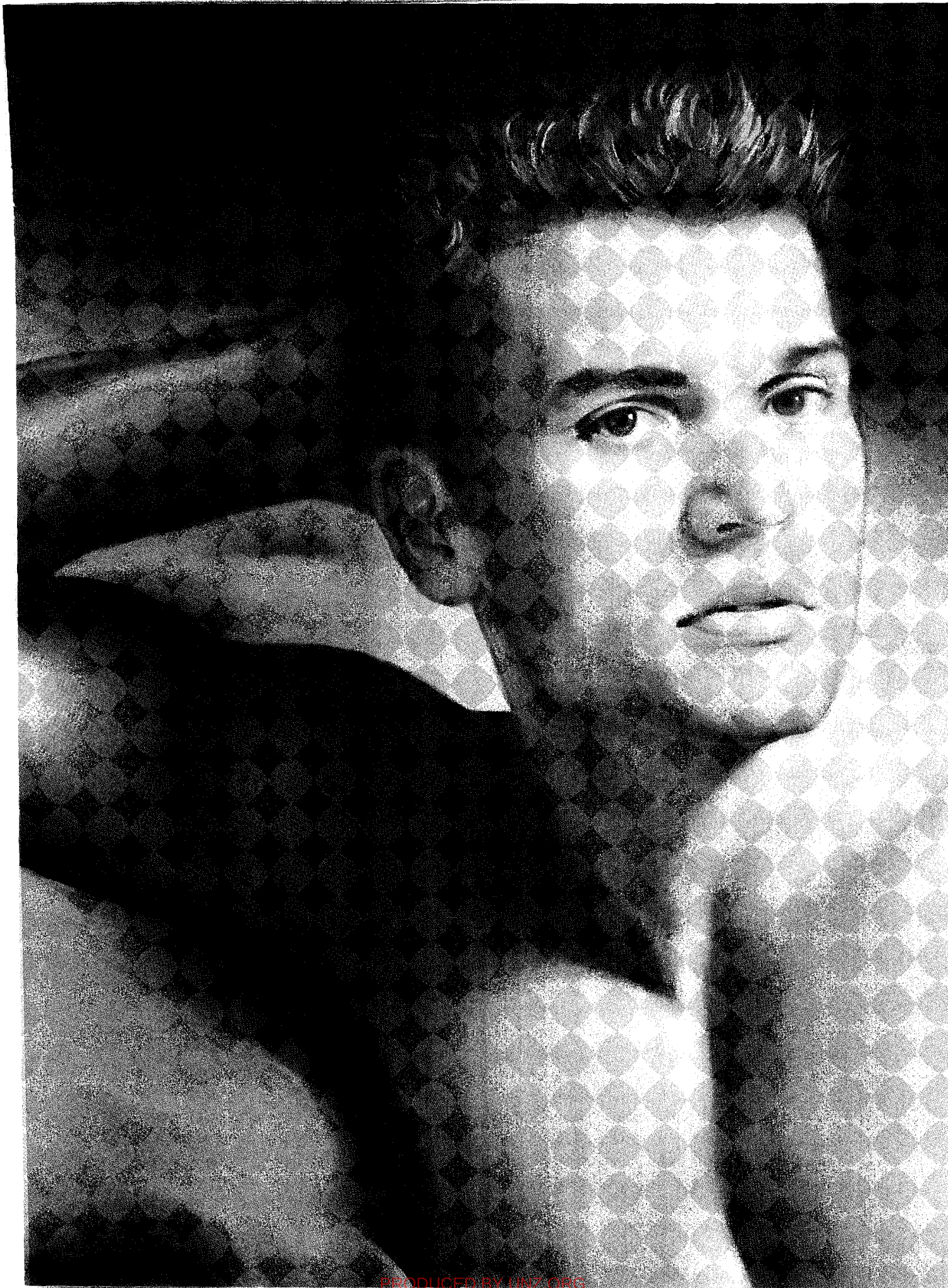
After Stonewall, gay stereotypes got butch: out went the queens and in came the clones—hypermasculine, moustachioed men whose big muscles, Levis, and work boots became premium symbols of gay identity. In the 1980s and early 1990s the AIDS epidemic again made vulnerability and other traditionally feminine traits more acceptable in gay culture; but when the crisis abated, the testosterone flowed again. Perhaps the most theatrical demonstration of this resurgent masculinity is the ascendance of circuit parties—bacchic all-night revels rippling wall-to-wall with world-class physiques.

Coming out in the past ten to fifteen years has been considerably eased by the mainstream culture's speedy incorporation of gay life (*Will and Grace*, Andrew Sullivan, Vermont). As a result, gay men in this generation are mostly indifferent to the faux tragedy and flamboyant exoticism of camp, and to old-time gay icons like Judy Garland. We have fetishized a flamboyant normalcy, exemplified by the frat-boy chic of Bruce Weber's slyly homoerotic ad campaigns for Abercrom-

one, maybe less . . . staring up at her and wringing his hands. He cannot and will not stop with his hands, even though his constant wringing pressure has forced the skin to burst. He holds a handkerchief as he continues to stare up at her and wring his hands and bleed." Goldman also gave readers some yuks by eavesdropping on straight men in the audience that night: "Tonight," says one married man to another, "no one goes to the men's room."

Perhaps the darkest dig at the gay-Garland connection came from Mel Torme, in *The Other Side of the Rainbow*, his 1970 memoir about working on *The Judy Garland Show* for CBS. Torme, who observed that it was "a rule, not an exception," that studio audiences for the show were "heavily populated" with "Odd Fellows," also repeated the remark of an unidentified "someone" who exclaimed, "Judy? Yeah, she's the Queen of the Fags!"

This is ugly stuff, and yet most gay writers have been equally harsh in their treatment of the subject. Gay love for Judy Garland is most often explained by slinging around stereotypes about the masochism of diva worship—an approach exemplified by Daniel Harris in *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (1997). Harris argues that gay men's wor-



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ship of divas, of which Garland is his primary example, is a pathology issuing from "the almost universal homosexual experience of ostracism and insecurity," which ultimately leads to "the aestheticism of maladjustment, the gay man's exploitation of cinematic visions of Hollywood grandeur to elevate himself above his antagonistic surroundings." Harris continues,

The answer to the proverbial question "why did gay men like Judy Garland so much?" is that they liked, not her, so much as her audience, the hordes of other gay men who gathered in her name to hear her poignant renditions of old torch songs that reduced sniffing queens to floods of self-pitying tears.

The specter of these "sniffing queens" wallowing in the campy show of Garland's melodramatic, drug-dazed last years has relegated her to a marginal place in gay culture today. Most surviving tributes are either kitschy (she occasionally pops up on greeting cards and T-shirts, and ad campaigns for gay travel agencies sometimes recycle the ruby-slippers motif in their promotional materials) or coarse ("Judy Garland Park," officially named Schuylkill Park, is a well-known outdoor cruising area in Philadelphia; a "Judy Garland Memorial Forest" of similar repute stands on Fire Island).

STRAINED EVASIONS

GARLAND'S popularity in the culture at large is perpetually nourished by a stream of high-end products that preserve or pay homage to her work: more than half the episodes of Garland's television variety show were recently issued on DVD. An uncut recording of the famous Carnegie Hall concert on April 23, 1961, including stage patter and applause never previously released, was issued this spring. A new biography, Gerald Clarke's *Get Happy*, was published this past March. A television movie based on *Me and My Shadows*, Lorna Luft's 1998 memoir of growing up as Garland's daughter, will be broadcast by ABC next season, with Judy Davis starring as Garland. And Garland's third and fourth husbands, Sid Luft and Mark Herron, are rumored to be at work on their own books about her.

Such events give succor to the few who brave on as Judy queens today. Yet even those who admit to admiring Garland temper their enthusiasm. The film director John Waters recently told me that he thinks the gay-Garland connection is "an embarrassing topic." (To put Waters's embarrassment in perspective: he makes movies whose characters have included a sphincter that sings.) "I mean, I do love her," he said, "but if a reporter were coming to my home, I wouldn't have Judy Garland playing. They'd think maybe upstairs I had a room devoted to her." Waters also said, "A gay man loving Judy could almost be like a black person watching a minstrel show"—a joke that suggests the degree of hostility, anger, and fear with which many gay men view this stereotype.

Presumably, hard-core gay Garland fans—including men who make a living as experts on her career—would be best qualified to talk about the connection between their love for her and their love for men. But they avoid the topic. "Judy sang for humanity," one asserts. Another says, "I've talked to gay men who are crazy about Judy, but I've also talked to a lot who are not." A third writes, "I feel the main reason that gay men love Judy Garland is for the same reason that straight men love her (indeed, why ANY human being would love her), because she is simply the most talented artist the world has ever known, and possibly ever will know." Given the ridicule that Judy queens have suffered over the years, a certain amount of defensiveness is to be expected. Yet the combined force of all these strained evasions renders one question about gay men who love Garland more compelling than the rest: Why are they afraid?

LONELIER AND TOUGHER

GARLAND embodied many of the paradoxical emotional states that gay men commonly experience while coming out: vulnerability and strength, sincerity and duplicity, self-consciousness and abandon, adolescence and maturity. The role of Dorothy alone could have secured her place in gay mythology—the lonely, misunderstood small-town kid who has a great adventure in a wild new world where fabulous friends appear to help her on her way, and where no sorrow can overwhelm her. For many gay men, Garland was also a mother figure. The playwright Charles Busch recalls his boyhood, saying, "I remember watching her with her children on television—she was presented as a kind of Auntie Mame at that point—and I remember thinking, wouldn't it be great to have a mom like that. She was so affectionate and fun, and she sang." Most crucially, and most simply, Garland recognized our existence. Gay men knew that she knew they loved her. In her last movie, *I Could Go On Singing* (1963), she even gave homosexuals in the audience a wink. "I've already drunk enough coffee to float Fire Island," she says in a throwaway line near the end of the film. To gay men in that closeted time the flicker of recognition must have seemed like a bolt of lightning.

Excavating the gay-Garland connection should begin, however, with considering how Garland stands out from other movie divas who have been glorified in gay culture. Mae West, Bette Davis, and Joan Crawford were self-sufficient and strong, on and off the screen; they moved with easy invincibility both inside and outside the bedroom. Although Garland is often counted among these women, she does not quite fit. Their strength was thoroughly self-assertive; hers was self-effacing. Beginning as the supportive, long-suffering, asexual foil for Mickey Rooney's adolescent adventures, she grew into a concert performer whose every appearance cried out, as the film director Stanley Kramer observed, "Here is my heart, break it."

Great Performers

Plácido Domingo "Se quel guerrier io fossi" from Verdi's *Aida* 1000
Enrico Caruso "Spirito Gentil" from *La Favorita* (Donizetti)* 1001
Vanessa-Mae Bach: Toccata and Fugue in D minor 1002
Yehudi Menuhin Bach: Sonata No. 1 in G minor 1003
Kristen Flagstad/Lauritz Melchior Love Duet from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (live from Covent Garden, 1939)* 1004



Kennedy Vivaldi: "Summer" from *The Four Seasons* Allegro, 1008
Jacqueline du Pre Adagio from Elgar's Cello Concerto 1005
Ignaz Jan Paderewski Beethoven: Sonata no. 14 in C-Sharp Minor ("Moonlight"), Adagio* 1006
George Gershwin "Sweet and Low Down" by Scott Joplin* 1007

Golden Age Of Lied

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf: "Zueignung" (R. Strauss) 1011
Hans Hotter: "Fruehlingstraum" from *Winterreise* (Schubert) 1012
Ernestine Schumann-Heink: "Erlkoenig" (Schubert)* 1013
Alexander Kipnis: "Sapphische Ode" (Brahms)* 1014
Richard Crooks: "Serenade" (Schubert)* 1015
Kirsten Flagstad: "Allerseelen" (R. Strauss)* 1016
John McCormack: "Morgen" (R. Strauss)* 1017
Helen Traubel: "Aufenthalt" (Schubert)* 1018

* historic recording.

20th-Century Music

Barber: Adagio for Strings 1021
Prokofiev: "Classical" Symphony, Allegro 1022
Copland: Fanfare for the Common Man 1023
R. Strauss: Four Last Songs: III. "Beim Schlafengehen" (Elisabeth Schwarzkopf) 1024
Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue (with George Gershwin)* 1025
Britten: "Moonlight" (Interlude from *Peter Grimes*) 1026
Bernstein: Overture to *Candide* 1027
Stravinsky: "The Firebird" 1028

Maria Callas

"Casta Diva" from Bellini's *Norma* 1032
 "Vissi d'Arte" from Puccini's *Tosca* 1033
 "O rendetemi la speme... Qui la voce" from Bellini's *I Puritani* 1034



"Il dolce suono" (Mad Scene) from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* 1035
 "Printemps, qui commence" from Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila* 1036
 "Suicidio" from *Ponchielli's La Gioconda* 1037
 "Libiamo" from Verdi's *La Traviata* — LIVE 1038

All-American Classics

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Bernstein: "West Side Story" (orchestral highlights) 1042
Bernstein: "Tonight" from *West Side Story* (Roberto Alagna/Angela Gheorghiu) 1043
Scott Joplin: "Maple Leaf Rag" 1044

Gottschalk: "Ojos Criollos (Danse Cubaine)", Caprice Brillante" 1045
Samuel Barber: "Knoxville, Summer of 1915" 1046
Traditional: "Shenandoah" (Paul Robeson)* 1047
Traditional: "Ain't That Good News" (Barbara Hendricks) 1048

Basically Baroque

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Pachelbel: Canon 1143
Handel: Menuet from Water Music (Sir Neville Marriner/Academy of St Martin in the Fields) 1144
Bach: Violin Concerto No. 1, Allegro (Anne-Sophie Mutter) 1145
Bach: Suite for Unaccompanied Cello 1, Prelude (M. Rostropovich) 1146
Bach: Air on the G String (Mariss Jansons/Oslo Philharmonic) 1147
Handel: Bourée from Water Music (Riccardo Muti/Berlin Philharmonic) 1148

Songs Of Schubert

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 Erlkoenig (Ian Bostridge) 1063
 Der Lindenbaum (from *Winterreise*) (Thomas Hampson) 0.1064
 An die Musik (Margaret Price) 1065
 Die Allmacht (Margaret Price) 1066

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Gershwin: "Love is Here to Stay" (Kiri te Kanawa) 1102
Jerome Kern: "Ol' Man River" from *Showboat* (Paul Robeson) 1103
Jerome Kern: "Only Make Believe I Love You" from *Showboat* (Jerry Hadley) 1104

Cole Porter: "Night and Day" (Yehudi Menuhin/Stephane Grappelli) 1105
Sondheim: "Send in the Clowns" (Maurice Andre) 1106
Bernstein: "Ohio" from *Wonderful Town* 1107

Classics For A Summer Night

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Debussy: "Clair de Lune" 1111
Beethoven: "Moonlight" Sonata 1112
Berlioz: "Villanelle" from *Les nuits d'été* 1113
Vivaldi: "Summer" from *The Four Seasons*, Allegro (Anne-Sophie Mutter/von Karajan/Vienna Philharmonic) 1114
Mendelssohn: Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1115

Handel: Music for the Royal Fireworks, Overture 1116
de Falla: Noches en los jardines de Espana (Nights in the Gardens of Spain) 1117
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Anne-Sophie Mutter



Verdi: "La donna e mobile" from *Rigoletto* (Nicolai Gedda) 1124
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Presumably, hard-core gay Garland fans—including men who make a living as experts on her career—would be best qualified to talk about the connection between their love for her and their love for men. But they avoid the topic.

To be sure, the woman did not know when to stop. Garland's concert performances were so intimate and unguarded that listeners believed she was singing for them individually. Jerry Lewis is quoted in *Judy Garland* (1974), by Anne Edwards, as having said, "People of all kinds, with worries and problems and heartaches, go to see her; and they identify with her. . . . The stout women in the audience identify with her, and the people who remember their own unhappy childhoods identify with her. All the people whose insides have been torn out by misery identify with her, and she is singing for all of them. In a way, she's singing with a hundred voices."

The most famous of Garland's signature songs either expose her loneliness and vulnerability ("The Man That Got Away," "Over the Rainbow") or trumpet a delirious confidence in love ("The Trolley Song," "Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart"). Yet even the love songs are fraught with Garland's sexless self-effacement: they describe a feverish experience of loving in which reciprocity is almost beside the point. (Compare this with the chutzpah of Barbra Streisand and Bette Midler, singers who have been crowned Garland's heirs; they carry themselves as if the whole world were created to provide wind beneath their wings.)

The high points of Garland's concerts coupled a song of the first kind with one of the second, for a one-two punch that felt listeners' pain and then carried them beyond it. For example, imagine yourself a gay man at her 1961 Carnegie Hall concert, your heart breaking as she sings "The Man That Got Away," whose lament for unrequited love perfectly describes your fear of growing old alone, because your relationships are so often short-lived, because you cannot live your love in public: "The road gets rougher / It's lonelier and tougher / With hope you burn up / Tomorrow he might turn up." Then, your eyes still stinging with tears, you watch her tiny frame fill with preternatural confidence. She reaches out to pick you up and set you down in the promised land, a place where you will never be lonely again. "San Francisco" begins in a mood so light and silly that the audience breaks into laughter at the very first phrase. Garland vamps through the first chorus, and then her pace slows, her intonation broadens, and you fly: "Saaaan Fraaaan-cisco / When I arrive, I really come alive / And you will laugh to see me / Perpendicular, hangin' on a cable car."

You might think she knows your heart. You might even think she loves you.

"TRULY, TRULY HAPPY"

GARLAND'S biographies attest that a particular connection with gay men was an abiding fact of her life. Her father, Frank Gumm, whom she adored, and Roger Edens, her mentor at M-G-M, who became a kind of surrogate father to her, were predominantly homosexual. It's unclear whether she was aware of her father's orientation.

It's also unclear how Garland felt about her gay following. She sometimes seemed to relish it, once bragging, "When I die I have visions of fags singing 'Over the Rainbow' and the flag at Fire Island being flown at half mast." (According to the film historian Vito Russo, houses on Fire Island were draped in black on that day.) Unfortunately, Garland also had a habit of falling in love with gay men, including two of her husbands, Vincente Minnelli and Mark Herron. *Get Happy*, Gerald Clarke's new biography, reveals that Herron, during his marriage to Garland, had an affair with Peter Allen, who at the time was married to Garland's daughter Liza Minnelli.

In her last years Garland was surrounded by a cadre of gay men who blurred the line between fandom and friendship. Lorna Luft has written that her mother's relationships with these men would descend into terrible confusion when Garland began falling in love with them: "I remember all too clearly the screaming accusations that filled our house in the middle of the night when she encountered one of her lovers' 'indiscretions.' I didn't hear the word 'fag' from the kids at school. I heard it from my mother."

Such details suggest that for the most devoted Judy queens, believing in the goddess must on some level have been a hard faith to keep. Sure, she was all theirs at the end—David Shipman's biography notes discreetly that Garland attended many parties where "she was the only woman present," and Gerald Clarke adds that when she got really desperate for money, she sometimes sang in gay piano bars. But the piano bars paid her \$100 a night, and she probably spent that on drugs. The seediest stories about the gay-Garland connection make it sound like the kind of arrangement that people get stuck with when they think that getting by is the best they can hope for. Still, Garland's wild ambivalence toward gay men was more gracious than her treatment of most people, including herself. And masochistic pleasure in the idol's defilement was probably only a minor aspect of Judy-love.

The most powerful of Garland's emotional conflicts, and the one that I believe best explains her particular appeal to

gay men, was her inner struggle between sincerity and duplicity. Garland's stage fright was legendary, and it was rooted in her inability to believe in her talent. (At the wrap party for her last M-G-M production, she confided in one of the film's music directors, "I'm a fat slob! I'm so ugly and untalented. They're going to find me out!") Nevertheless, she said that the only times she was "truly, truly happy" were when she was performing.

Her mortal fear of duplicity fueled the creation of a character whose appeal was the soul of sincerity. This did not quell her anxiety. The more fully invested Garland became in her stage persona, the more intense her love for her audience grew; because she valued this connection above all others, the role she played eventually devoured her life. Gerald Clarke creates a precise and chilling picture of the way in which Garland fed her audiences her soul. A visitor to her dressing room during her final singing engagement in London saw her listening to a recording of the performance she had just given. Clarke describes the scene: "'Oooh!' she cried when she heard the first burst of applause. Then, leaning into her makeup mirror, she kissed her own reflection, 'You're a star!' she exclaimed. 'You're a star! You're a star!'"

Yet Garland's role-playing was not merely self-destructive. It also allowed her to reveal something true about herself. To sing the song that was most completely her own, Garland often donned drag—an androgynous hobo outfit that she referred to as her "Little Tramp" costume. Thus attired, she ended hundreds of concerts sitting on the edge of the stage, a spotlight shining on her face, singing "Over the Rainbow." There is one surviving film of her performing the song this way—one long extreme closeup, in which the coal smudges on her chin and cheeks draw attention to the black pools of her eyes, focused on infinity. In her short black wig with messy bangs, she looks like a little boy who has been playing in the dirt on a windy day. Sometimes on the rests between notes her lips shape the coming lyric, as if the words were fighting their way out of her. At one moment she smiles as if she sees something so beautiful that she cannot contain her delight; at the next she shakes with an innocent anger, as if she knows that her longing will never lead to the freedom she imagines with such devastating clarity.

Gay men know about role-playing. Most of us become adept at artifice early on. We learn, often before we know that we are learning, how to hide many of our deepest desires, even from ourselves. Coming out almost always sparks an inner

struggle between sincerity and duplicity—a fight to find and claim whatever is real inside us. So there is a strange comfort in seeing Garland trapped in a terror that we know, wondering if she is really Judy Garland or if her whole self is a sham. For the gay men who believed in her, who believed despite her failures that her sincerity and her joy were real, this act of faith cannot have been unrelated to the project of believing in themselves—even if the selves they believed in were selves they had to make up.

MAINLY FOR YOURSELF

COMING out offers every gay man the chance to make his life new. Before it is a declaration of desire for sex, coming out is a decision to accept one's desires and a commitment to figuring out how best to live accordingly. Because one can bear only so much freedom, however, many men have opted to play one of the roles that gay culture has concocted for us—from the Judy queen to the butch clone to the Abercrombie & Fitch jock. None of these roles is exactly congruent with anyone's true self; each is merely a vehicle for expressing powerful and contradictory feelings about what it means to be gay.

For a lurid show of such feelings, look back at that relic from the last days of Garland's reign, *The Boys in the Band*. The setting is a queen's birthday party; in the climactic scene the party's host, Michael, dares each guest to reveal the greatest love of his life. This is in part a ruse to force a purportedly straight man who has shown up unexpectedly to define his ambiguous sexual identity. In the end Michael's preoccupation with questions of identity destroys his ability to engage his friend's actual personality—a failure to love that, the play suggests, stems from Michael's self-hatred.

The allusion made in the play's title relates directly to gay role-playing. About halfway through *A Star Is Born*, Garland, playing an unknown singer for whom James Mason has arranged a Hollywood screen test, loses her confidence. On the morning of her screen test the studio wardrobe department convinces Garland that her look is all wrong, that she must be a different kind of woman to be acceptable in the movies. Mason, who discovered Garland singing in the wee hours in an empty jazz club with the chairs turned up on the tables, and spied in her a native talent more powerful than any he had ever seen before, snaps her back to her natural self before she goes in front of the cameras: "It's the Downbeat Club at three

Gay men of my generation are mostly indifferent to the faux tragedy and flamboyant exoticism of camp, and to old-time gay icons like Judy Garland. Young gay men today just want to be regular guys—with better-than-average bodies.

o'clock in the morning," he says, "and you're singing for yourself and for the boys in the band—mainly for yourself."

In *A Star Is Born*, the boys in the band are the people with whom you are your truest self—the ones who know you and bring out great things in you. But the boys in Crowley's band are not supportive, trusted insiders; they are a community of individuals whose solitude is never breached. They are, in the words of another Garland standard, "alone together." Thus the play's title is a poor description of its characters' relationships with one another. "The boys in the band" works better as a description of the relationship between the play's characters and the gay men in its audience. It challenges us to find some way of understanding them as our people, at the same time that it challenges us to not turn out the same. Above all, the title orders us, as individuals, to drop the pretense, to remember who we are.

Judy Garland began losing her power over gay men because we got that message and started becoming more integrated characters than the screaming queens of yore. We no longer need a surrogate to embody the conflicts that so many of us experience, because we now have more and better resources for sorting them out for ourselves. Young gay men have ditched diva worship and chosen the role of the regular guy as a gesture of healthy adolescent rebellion, a way of taking full advantage of what's distinctive about coming out now: coming out is increasingly viewed, and experienced, as a gesture of strength that makes one more of a man, not less.

All that is true, but so is this: the fetish of the normal guy is also a function of fear. Previous generations of gay men faced the risk of social exile when they came out. My generation worried less about being outcast and more about being dead.

So we play strong, and we banish the Judy queens because they are emblems of weakness. In the past, when gay culture was a community of outcasts, it was a community where weakness could be forgiven and enjoyed. Now it is a community of survivors, in which we are likely to deny or despise all signs of weakness in our numbers.

AWKWARD INTENSITIES

I SAW Liza Minnelli's one-woman show, *Minnelli on Minnelli*, at New York's Palace Theatre last December. The first act was a raw spectacle of fear and courage. At times Minnelli literally trembled with fright. Her manner was tentative and her intonation sloppy, and her six hunky chorus boys gamely saw her through. Then, every once in a while, from God knows where, she would pull out the power of Sally Bowles, her role in *Cabaret*. The contrast was exhausting to watch. During intermission, at the mezzanine bar, I said hello to a young man in a muscle-hugging, sky-blue spandex shirt, whom I recognized from Boston. "What do you think of Liza?" I asked.

"I don't care about her," he said without a trace of irony. "But I *love* those *guys*."

His response both horrified and relieved me—horrified because it neatly summarized the ruthless dimension of the cultural shift I've been describing, and relieved because Minnelli's half-crippled stage presence made me so uncomfortable that I, too, had been focused on a hairy-chested chorus boy for much of the evening.

After Minnelli's show I got into a cab that might as well have been a time machine, and went to see the female impersonator Tommy Femia do his Judy Garland act at the midtown drag club Don't Tell Mama. "Are the children here tonight?" he called out, forlorn. "Lorna . . . ? Liza . . . ? Hmm . . . Well. You're *all* my babies! Especially in this neck of the woods."

The mostly gay audience laughed pitilessly at the first, needy pleas, which played on Garland's emotional failings and highlighted the loneliness that is so much a part of her popular image—and was once so much a part of our own. Our meanness and judgment made room for a rush of sympathy and self-deprecation when she suddenly, comically claimed us—"You're *all* my babies."

This exchange is a perfect example of the purifying power of camp. Susan Sontag has observed, "Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of 'character.'" Moreover, "what it does is to find the success in certain passionate failures." In this respect the Judy queens were on to something important. Finding the success in passionate emotional failure was their forte. And the role they played, like most of the roles gay men have played, was an earnest but imperfect effort to heal the anger and fear that coming out forced on them.

Since the 1960s the Judy-queen stereotype has helped to shape popular notions in this country of what it is to be gay. Every man who has come out since then has had to come to terms with that and other stereotypes, in a process that combines accepting and resisting these notions with innumerable strategies, from lifting weights to watching *The Wizard of Oz*. Now straight people depend less on such stereotypes for understanding gay men, and we depend less on them for defining ourselves. As a result, the average guy with the better-than-average body is growing confident and comfortable enough with his love for men that he can move easily between the Kansas that he comes from and the Oz that he makes up. It is increasingly true that he can go anywhere, including home, in full possession of his integrity as a gay man.

If his strength is more than cosmetic, however, he will not despise or deny the Judy queens; he will give them at least as much grace as the world now gives him. Then he will really be out of the woods. The distinction between Kansas and Oz will not disappear, but something much better will happen: the whole world will turn Technicolor. ☼

The Face-Lift

by ROXANA ROBINSON

The whole world seemed spread out before Cristina in a series of wild and hilarious adventures, which she chose to see as absurd although she knew exactly how dangerous and serious they really were

THIS happened in San Salvador, not long ago. My friend Cristina was coming back from lunch at a restaurant downtown with her mother, Elvira, and her mother's friend, Consuela. They were in Cristina's big car, and all three sat in the back. The driver was alone in the front seat.

Cristina was dropping her mother and Consuela off at her mother's house. Her mother lives on a narrow street lined with high stucco walls and solid gates. Everyone in that neighborhood has big heavy gates controlled by electricity. The car drives up to the gate, the chauffeur pushes a remote-

control button, the gates open inward, the car drives inside, and the gates close after it. The walls in San Salvador have always been high. In the past broken bottles were cemented into the tops of them—a row of glittering teeth to keep people from climbing over. Now electrified wires have replaced the broken bottles. El Salvador has always been like this, but since the revolution security has become more of a problem.

Cristina's car pulled into Elvira's clean, quiet street. All the houses there were tidy, all the high stucco walls freshly painted, all the gates tightly closed. They drove slowly down the



block toward Elvira's house. A car, which no one noticed, was parked halfway down the block. At her mother's house Cristina told the driver to pull over to the sidewalk, to let her mother and Consuela out. They didn't go in through the big gates because Cristina was continuing on from there. The two women would get out at the little street door, right next to the sidewalk.

"*Por aquí, por aquí, por aquí,*" Cristina said rapidly to the driver. Cristina says everything rapidly; she moves quickly and talks fast. She is quite beautiful, with thick black-brown

hair and large, bright, dark eyes. She has an oval face and a short, straight nose. Her eyelids are slightly droopy, which gives her a drowsy, aristocratic look. She was my roommate in boarding school.

Cristina and I went to the same girls' school, outside Philadelphia, on the Main Line, but we came from very different worlds. I grew up in the country, in western Pennsylvania. My mother was the librarian at my elementary school, and my father was a doctor. We lived in an old stone farmhouse, rather dark inside, with small windows. I was an only child. Every night the three of us sat down to dinner at the round wooden table in the kitchen. We bowed our heads, and then my mother said grace over the food. After we raised our heads, I poured each of us a glass of water. The pitcher was made of dark-blue china. My father spoke very little at meals, and our house was quiet inside. Outside were smooth rolling fields. At night I could feel the three of us in our small lighted house, alone in all that empty land, set among the dark fields.

I was brought up to be good and obey the rules, and I was, and I did. I couldn't imagine violating those beliefs that grown-ups held: that rules were important, that lies were intolerable, that being good was the correct way to be. At school I was good. I wasn't good enough to be a star at anything (I was a mediocre student), but I wasn't bad. The worst thing I ever did was to sneak out on Halloween and go trick-or-treating through the darkened streets of Bryn Mawr, carrying a pillowcase and knocking timidly at front doors. I never lied to teachers or sneaked out to meet boys or cheated on tests or smuggled in alcohol or smoked marijuana or did anything wrong. Those things were beyond me somehow, out of my reach. The rules I'd been given held me within their bounds.

But Cristina came from a large family and a fiery-hot place that was unimaginable to me, and she broke any rule she felt like breaking. She kept vodka in our room at school, right on her bureau. It was in a Phisohex bottle, in full view of the housemother. Cristina looked straight into teachers' eyes and lied about where she was going for the weekend. She lied about how she was getting there and who she was seeing. She did all this with a bold and absolute certainty that I admired: she was utterly sure of the rules she wanted to break and of the things she needed to do. She didn't care about her grades or about honesty or about living up to people's expectations. All that was immaterial to her. The things she did need to do were things like going off to Princeton for the weekend. The things she didn't need to do were things like homework.

After we graduated, I went on to college and Cristina went back to El Salvador. In school she had laughed when I asked her about college.

"Are you kidding?" she said. "You have no idea what it's like down there. No one I know goes to college."

"But what do you do instead?" I asked.

"We do our hair, and then we do our nails." She looked up at me and laughed again. "What we do is visit each other. We go and stay with friends in their country places; then they come

BEST FRIEND

Memory, till now, has kept inviting
new printings as often as
it re-reads old ones. What a huge
noise it makes! Songs, poems, postures, a slice
of an opera, a warm mouthful of potato
pizza, an amazingly sexy occurrence
on a couch in Kansas, the chalky gesture of
a classroom teacher, the stench of a faraway
pig farm: I never need ask it
a favor. It lets me into adjoining lives
by their back doors, recovering nothing
I have ever been indifferent to,
even acts omitted (the chap-lipped freckled girl
unkissed, my scowling enemy set scot-free).
Five senses should suffice, but memory
lends me a sixth to embrace them all.
Without it I'd be a traffic jam of
sensations; only with its help may I revisit
myself. Cannily selective, it guides me
into the *Heiliger Dankgesang*, Sappho's ode,
the flavor of Blatz, the color
of a mountain bluebird, the lost face
of my mother. Memory cherishes
every self it has ever cared for.
Thanks, old friend. Don't let me down.

—PETER DAVISON

and stay with us at our beach houses. We go to someone's ranch in Argentina. We go down to Rio sometimes. We're busy! This takes up all our time."

"Then we get married," she added.

While she was telling me this, Cristina was sitting on her bed with no clothes on, a thick maroon towel wrapped around her head. She had a bigger, thicker towel wrapped around her body, tucked in on itself at her left armpit. Her legs were shaved perfectly smooth. She was painting her toenails, very meticulously, and she had tiny puffs of cotton separating her toes. She had a bottle of scarlet nail polish, and undercoat, and overcoat, and bottles of other luxurious things—emollients and oils and lotions. It looked as if a professional had just stepped out of the room for a moment, in the middle of doing a job on Cristina's toes.

I never did my toenails at school. Even today I've never done my toenails. My feet are large and rather homely. Putting scarlet shimmer on my big, square nails would be an error, and I can't help knowing this. I loved the way Cristina put shimmer on her toes, the way she put shimmer anywhere, everywhere, wherever she wanted.

CRISTINA got married two years after we graduated from boarding school. She invited me to the wedding, but it was during my final exams, and I couldn't go. In fact, I never went down to see her. We wrote to each other for a few years, but Cristina is not much interested in writing. After the letters stopped, she sent Christmas cards, and each year I would examine her family photograph: there was Cristina, looking wonderful, tanned and gleaming, with her delicious, smooth caramel skin and her thick, dark hair and sleepy eyes, standing beside her husband, who was very handsome. Cristina had always said she would marry only a handsome man. His name was Carlos, which she pronounced "Car-los," with a wonderful sort of gargle between the syllables. Car-los was tan too, with a square face, dashing low eyebrows, big, brilliant black eyes. The children looked like Cristina, exactly. Two girls and a boy. I watched them on the Christmas cards, turning more and more like Cristina each year, their chins pointed, their small, perfect bodies supple and alert, their features neat and animated. I knew their names: Analisa, Jorge, Elenita. Sometimes when I was thinking about Cristina, I would say those names in a whisper to myself: Analisa, Jorge, Elenita. They had such a crackle, such a lilt. That seemed to be the way Cristina's life was.

After college I got married, and in the beginning I thought I would have children too. I sent Cristina Christmas cards, sometimes seasonal pictures of reindeer or snowy forests and sometimes snapshots of Mark and me. Every year I hoped I would be able to put a note on our card: "Next Christmas there'll be three of us!" I imagined writing the notes. I imagined different ways of making my announcement, something lively or funny or clever. A photograph of the two of us with a

note next to it: "How many people are in this picture? Wrong."

Cristina didn't come to my wedding, because she was pregnant with her first child. She was too big to travel, she told me. She couldn't move, she told me. I smiled as I read this, trying to imagine Cristina as big as a house, lying like a languorous whale on a sofa out on a verandah, long-leafed plants in giant urns at each end. I liked the image of her sleepy and swollen. This is what it's like, I thought to myself, with a little thrill of anticipation. Soon I would know about this: morning sickness, fatigue, swollen ankles.

When I learned that she had become pregnant again, three years later, I felt a jolt. It seemed unfair that she should be pregnant for the second time before I was for the first. Then it happened a third time. I saw her swollen belly on the Christmas-card photograph that year, with a casual hand laid on top of it, and I felt betrayed and abandoned, as though some promise to me had not been kept. I loved Cristina, and I didn't begrudge her having children. But when she did, I felt the absence of my own.

Cristina always asked on her Christmas cards when I was going to come down and visit them, and I thought for years that I would. But I never found a good time to do it, so I just kept Cristina and Carlos and the three tiny Cristinas in my head. I imagined them living luxuriously in a low colonial city with stone buildings, wide colonnaded avenues, palm trees, and scarlet flowers erupting everywhere.

When I heard about the revolution, about assassinations and hostages and *desaparecidos*, I worried. I wrote Cristina twice, but she didn't reply. I hoped they had moved to Guatemala, where Carlos had family and business interests, or somewhere else less dangerous. Carlos and Cristina came from very rich families, and it seemed that everyone they knew was rich. Being rich had originally seemed like a great shining carapace of protection over them, shielding them from everything: from having to go to college, having to wake up in the night with a crying baby, having to carry money, having to stand in line at the supermarket, having to find a parking place. But during the revolution being rich took on another aspect. It seemed like a signal they gave off continually and involuntarily, which made them terrifyingly vulnerable, as if they were targets for heat-seeking missiles that followed them no matter how they twisted and turned, no matter what they tried to do to save themselves.

I hoped that Cristina and her family were somewhere safe, and I found out later that they were. They had gone to Guatemala.

Then one year they turned up in New York, the whole family, for a week before Christmas. Cristina called me, and we made a plan to meet for lunch. She looked just as appealing as she always had—vivid and exotic, her clothes a little brighter than a New York woman's, her jewelry a little more brilliant. She held my shoulders tightly in her hands and kissed me on both cheeks.

"Julie!" she said. "You look *wonderful*!"

I didn't look wonderful. I knew that. I'm plain, with pale,

freckled skin. I've put on a middle, and I wear my skirts below the knee. My hair is just as it was at boarding school, shoulder length, and held back from my face with a tortoise-shell band. Even when I remember to wear earrings, as I did that day, they look as though I've borrowed them from someone. I've always looked like this. I never had the nerve to wear clothes that were tight and spangled, jazzy and stretchy. When I was at school, wearing clothes like that seemed wrong. I felt I had to make a moral choice, and that somehow I was coming down on the right side. I think I believed in some long-term goal, as though later on I might get an award for Discreet Dressing. Now I can't change; this is the only way I know how to dress.

\$50,000 a year in small grants. We review the recipients very carefully. We visit the sites, we interview the participants, we talk to other people in the field for references. We want to feel that we are rewarding the people who most deserve it. I want to give them their due.

I've always tried to be fair, and to be responsible. I once thought that was the way the world worked, the way everyone worked. At school I was always amazed that Cristina got away with what she did. I confess that at times I almost hoped Cristina would get caught at something. In those moments I resented her astonishing bravado.

I remember her one Friday afternoon during our junior



I'M divorced now. Mark has remarried and lives in San Francisco, where he works for a software company. He has two children—boys, I think. I haven't heard from him in years. We have no reason to talk ever again. Nothing connects us now but pain. Looking back at that time we were together is like looking into a black tunnel of grief—tumultuous, endless, without solace. Just thinking of his name brings back the memory of that misery.

I'm used to living on my own, though I'd hoped not to. I live in a small apartment in Murray Hill. I run a family arts foundation that specializes in music education, and we give away

year. Cristina stood coolly in the handsome front hall of the school, on the Oriental rug, next to the big Spanish chest. She was wearing a new orange suit and was waiting for a taxi to come and take her to the train with her suitcase.

"Now, let me see, Cristina. This is your uncle's name, Alfredo Pacheco?" Mrs. Winston, the housemother, held Cristina's weekend form, which she had duly filled out. Mrs. Winston was a pleasant woman, tall and lean and attractive, with black-rimmed glasses, perfectly curled-under gray hair, and a perfectly straight back.

"That's right, Mrs. Winston," Cristina said. She smiled daz-

zlingly at the housemother. Cristina's shoes and pocketbook matched, both dark brown. Her hair was glossy and full of bounce. She had a brown-and-orange silk scarf at her throat.

"And he lives in Philadelphia, at this address?" Mrs. Winston looked at the form.

"That's right," Cristina said. "I put down his phone number. That's where I'll be." She was going to Princeton for House-parties Weekend.

"All right," Mrs. Winston said, looking again at the form. "This seems fine." The taxi drew up to the door, and Cristina picked up her suitcase. "Have a nice time," Mrs. Winston called, and Cristina waved as she got into the taxi. She looked out at me and waved again, her smile to me slightly different. She never got caught; I never went to House-parties Weekend.

But in New York that day, when she grabbed me and hugged me, I was caught up again by her energetic intimacy, won over by her charm.

"Tell me everything," Cristina said, sitting down again, "and let's get something to drink—or at least I hope you'll have a drink. Everyone has stopped drinking. And smoking. Do you mind?" She looked at me solicitously, holding up a cigarette.

"I don't mind," I said, "but the restaurant won't let you." We were in a small Italian place in the East Seventies, just off Madison. She couldn't smoke there or in any New York restaurant; it was now illegal.

Cristina waved her hand. "Oh, they don't mind if I smoke," she said. "I've already talked to the waiter." Someone had put an ashtray next to her, and she flipped open her lighter and lit up. I was surprised by this. I had not seen anyone smoke in a restaurant since the law was passed, and I looked nervously over at the waiter, but he walked right by our table with a bottle of wine, ignoring us completely. I wondered if Cristina had to obey any rules at all.

"What's happened to everyone?" Cristina asked, drawing hard on her cigarette, sucking in her cheeks for a long, disreputable pull. She exhaled, shaking her head and expelling a bluish cloud. "I go away for a couple of years and all of a sudden the entire population of New York has turned into goody-goodies. What is it?" She grinned at me. "I bet *you* don't smoke, do you?" she said, cocking her head.

"No," I admitted, "but I never really did."

"No, that's right," Cristina said, remembering. She leaned back in her chair and took another luxurious drag on her cigarette. She grinned again. "You never did. You never broke any of the rules. You made me feel like such a bad girl! I felt like a felon!" She laughed and shook her head. "But now you're a big success, eh? I hear you're the head of your foundation! *¡La Exigente!*"

That's how Cristina talks—all exclamation points and big scarlet smiles. Anything is more fun when she tells it. Listening to her, and watching her smoke, I found myself being torn, as I always had been, between simply adoring her and wishing grumpily that somehow she wouldn't get away with everything.

"You look terrific," I said, which was true.

Cristina pulled in her chin and gave me a knowing look. "*Please*," she said extravagantly, rolling her eyes. She put down her cigarette and turned sideways, thrusting her head out and stretching out her neck. A tiny swag of skin hung below her chin. Cristina patted the top of her hand against it. "What about this horror? But it's going," she announced. She turned back to face me and touched a line between her eyebrows. "And this."

I dropped my voice. "You're having your face done?" I asked, impressed.

Cristina shrugged elaborately. "I wouldn't call it *done*," she said. "Only the chin, the line in the forehead. A few little alterations—but hey! nobody's perfect." She picked up her cigarette again and added, "Except this surgeon, I hope. He's supposed to be a genius. He's in Brazil." There was another pause while she grinned. Then she added, "I'll probably come out looking like a monkey."

I confess that when I heard this, about having a face-lift, I felt a tiny surge of moral triumph. Scarlet nails were one thing, I thought, but a face-lift was something else. A face-lift, I thought, was wretched excess—now she had gone too far. Makeup seemed to me fundamentally different from surgery, and self-respect should keep us all from the latter. A line had to be drawn, and it involved integrity and honesty and probity. Face-lifts were definitely on the other side, the far side, of that line. That women debased themselves in trying to fight the biological fact of aging seemed clear. Women who struggled were acting foolishly, I believed, and women who didn't struggle were acting with dignity and self-confidence. So when she told me what she was going to do, I felt a thrill, as though I had at last bettered Cristina at something. I felt a jolt of self-righteousness.

"You know we've moved back to El Salvador?" Cristina asked. She took another long pull on her cigarette. "Last summer. Everyone's moving back there."

"Is it safe?" I asked.

"Well. We have armed holdups, hijackings, and murders, but no rapes. Which is to say that San Salvador is safer than New York City." She smiled and then shrugged her shoulders. "It's home. It's where I grew up. The revolution is over. Everyone is going back."

Cristina's troubles were over. She was back at home, after the revolution, with all three children and her handsome husband, and she was still rich. And in another few weeks she'd look twenty-eight again, instead of forty-two. I found myself wondering if she would go on forever getting away with things. But I knew this was meanspirited, and I dislike that side of myself. So what I said to her was that I was glad she could go home now, and I meant what I said. I do love Cristina, and I don't like my uncharitable side. I told her I was glad the danger was over.

"Well," Cristina said, and paused again. "It's not really over. It's never really over, right?" She stubbed out her cigarette and gave me her big flashy smile. "And who cares?"

THAT day in San Salvador, Cristina told the driver to pull over to the side of the street, behind the car that was already parked there. For some reason the driver was taking a long time to pull in behind the other car, which was where he had to go to be right next to the street door, so that Elvira and Consuela could step across the sidewalk, through the door, and into Elvira's courtyard.

"*Andale, ándale, ándale,*" Cristina said rapidly, leaning forward. The driver started to say something to her, but Elvira spoke at the same time, and Cristina turned back to her mother. Their car pulled in behind the other and stopped. Consuela opened her door but didn't get out; she was waiting for

down unintentionally on the grass next to Consuela, who was leaning over, holding her knee. No one was on the street; the sidewalks were empty. All the houses were hidden behind high walls and closed electronic gates.

Get out, get out, get out, the man said, pointing the gun at the driver. The driver turned his face away at once, as though that would make him safer. Then he ducked down and climbed out of the car, sinking to his knees. All these things happened quickly—the two older women sitting heavily on the grass, the driver in his dark uniform crawling on his knees along the hard paved road.

The man with the gun was wearing a dark shirt and pants, no



Elvira, who was asking Cristina about a piece of silver she was going to return.

"Okay, okay, okay," Cristina was saying, very rapidly. "Okay, Mama, you're right. *Claro que sí.* I'll do it tomorrow. I don't know why I didn't do it before. You're right, the sooner the better. Okay," she said again. And just then all three women realized that something was happening.

The door that Consuela was holding nearly shut was suddenly pulled open, and Consuela herself, gray-haired, in a sleek gray dress and carrying a black bag, was yanked out by her arm. Frightened, she fell onto the grass strip along the sidewalk. The man in the doorway was holding a gun that was bigger than his face, and he grabbed at Elvira, pulling her out as well. The whole time he was talking fast, fast, fast.

Get out, he was saying. Get out or I'll kill you. Get out, he said to the driver. I'll kill you all, get out, get out. He kicked Elvira as he pulled her out. She staggered a bit and then sat

jacket. He had dark skin and black hair, and his face was pockmarked. His black eyes were enraged, as if hatred and wildness were the only things inside him. He pulled Cristina out of the back seat and held on to her arm as she stood next to him on the grass. He held her tightly as he pulled open the front passenger door. He was watching Elvira and Consuela then, and he pointed his gun at them. I'll kill you, I'll kill you, he promised over and over, and his voice was filled with such wildness, such heat, such fury, that no one doubted him. He slid into the front seat, pulling Cristina in after him, keeping his gun pointed at the two older women. Don't move or I'll kill you, he chanted.

Then it was like a movie, everything happening without anyone's being able to stop it—him moving into the car, the chauffeur crawling farther and farther away along the street, Cristina's eyes brilliant as the man held his elbow around her neck in the front seat. And just as in a movie, everyone could see how things were going to unfold—that this was how it

happened, how one became *desaparecida*. Cristina could see that she was not going to be helped. She saw herself getting into the car with this man and his gun, leaving her mother and her children and Carlos, and the man muttering in a steady, violent stream that he would kill them all.

And then something else happened. Elvira, who was struggling to stand up, realized that Cristina had been pulled back into the car with the gunman, and she turned and ran the few steps across the grass to the hood of the car and threw herself across it, her gold earrings glinting against the hard shine of the black car.

"Don't take her!" Elvira screamed. "Don't take her, she's a mother! ¡Es una madre! ¡Tiene tres niños! Take me!" Elvira banged her thin old-woman's arms against the hood in a horrible, unsettling, embarrassing way. "Take me!" she screamed, her voice high and demanding. "Take me! Don't take her! She has three children! Take me!" She clambered up the hood in her beautiful silk-print dress, beating at it with her fragile fists, her gold bracelets jangling on the metal and her wild, screaming face looming through the windshield.

The gunman was trying to organize himself—to hold on to Cristina with his arm hooked around her throat, to hold the gun cocked in the air, and to pull the driver's door shut and find the key and turn it in the ignition and ignore the terrible screaming of the old woman who was flailing on the hood in front of him.

He leaned out the window to shout at her. "We don't want an old woman," he yelled contemptuously. "We want the young one."

When he said that, it was as though everything stopped for Cristina, just for one moment. Everything crystallized slowly and perfectly in her mind. She heard the gunman's shout, and she could see what would happen next: She could see the car driving off, with her mother thrown onto the street, weeping and flinging her hands up in the air. She could see herself being driven to the place where the gunman's friends waited. She knew the pain that was waiting for her there among them. She could see that she would die, that they would kill her. She meant nothing to them, and once her body was still, they would throw it from the car. It would be found by the side of a road, and later it would be taken, bruised and discolored, to her family. Then her mother would weep in earnest. It was that thought—the thought of her mother when they found her body, and of her children sinking moment by moment into the profound darkness of grief, that changed everything for Cristina.

As the gunman held her close to his body, his mind distracted, and leaned out the driver's window to shout at her mother, who was screaming at him through the windshield, Cristina bent her arm and brought it down as hard as she could, the point of her elbow driving—as hard as she had ever imagined doing anything—deep into the soft place where the gunman's legs met his body. What she did was smooth and exact, as in a dream, as though she had practiced that one stroke all her life, in preparation for this moment.

The gunman's face dropped like a stone toward the place where her elbow had hit him. His whole body seemed to turn in on itself, as if it now had some secret business, rolling tightly and deeply into itself with a grunt. And even before the gunman's head started going down, almost before she felt him start to crumple, Cristina found herself moving, sliding across the front seat, opening the door and spilling herself out onto the grass.

Outside the car things had changed: Elvira was pulling herself off the hood, Consuela had managed to stagger to her feet, and from the corner of her eye Cristina could see the houseman, alerted by all the commotion, by her mother's furious pounding and demands, standing in the open doorway of the house.

"Porfirio!" Cristina yelled to him at the top of her lungs. "Call the police! Kidnappers! Thieves! Call the police!" Now it was her turn, now she was yelling over and over, anger and wildness in her voice. The gunman clambered out of the car and began running toward the other car, which was idling in front of him. The chauffeur thought he was being pursued, so he lay on the street without moving, as if he were already dead, so that he wouldn't be shot. The gunman pulled open the back door of the other car and jumped in, and before the door was even shut again, the car fishtailed and skidded and roared and gunned off down the street. It was a red sedan, an old, beat-up American car. It was never found.

CRISTINA told me all that while we were having lunch. The restaurant we were in was chic, and full of women with streaked blonde hair, wearing snappy tailored suits and gold earrings. The Italian waiters wore white aprons over black pants and long-sleeved white shirts with the sleeves rolled up.

Cristina told me the story the way she tells everything, with exclamation points and pauses, rolling her eyes. She told it as though it were both extravagant and hilarious, as though the gunman, holding her desperate throat in the crook of his brutal arm, were funny; as though her three children, poised on the verge of endless grief, were funny; as though her mother, beating her frail old arms on the car's hood and shouting crazily through the windshield, were funny; as though her own brilliant and daring and courageous escape were funny—as though the whole world were spread out before her in a series of wild and hilarious adventures, which she chose to see as absurd although she knew exactly how dangerous and serious they really were. She talked as though boldness and certainty and a fearless readiness to break rules, any rules at all, were all normal traits—common, insignificant, negligible. She talked as though challenges were there for her amusement, as though they were simply things for her to respond to, like a swimmer lofting herself miraculously over the crests of great waves.

And I forgave Cristina the vodka, the House-parties Week-ends, the smoking, the face-lift, the children. I forgave her everything. ☁



Charlie Haden, Bass

No other instrument in jazz is more essential than the bass, both backbone and heartbeat, and Haden is its master

A 1999 issue of the magazine *Jazziz* featured on its cover a photograph of Charlie Haden, cropped so that the fingerboard and tuning pegs and scroll of his string bass occupied center page, and only the left side of Haden's face, the fingers of his left hand, and his left shoulder were visible. Haden

by Francis Davis

was one of the sidemen with whom the alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman turned jazz upside down at the end of the 1950s.

He was a member of the Coleman-alumni band Old and New Dreams from its formation, in 1976 (by which point Coleman himself was playing an idiosyncratic brand of funk, in an am-

plified setting), until its demise, a few years ago. Whenever Coleman returns to an acoustic context, Haden is still the bass player he is likely to call.

But Haden also enjoys a sovereign identity as the leader of two ensembles as different from each other as they are from Coleman's or anyone else's: the Liberation Music Orchestra, for which Haden and the arranger Carla Bley have written music in solidarity with revolutionary movements, often using actual field recordings as a springboard; and the in-search-of-lost-time Quartet West, whose evocations of film noir and the detective fiction and torch songs of the 1940s and early 1950s heighten nostalgia into the most powerful of emotions.

Haden might have taken offense at being crowded off the magazine's cover. Yet the unusual angle actually captured him better than a smiling head shot would have. No other bass player since Charles Mingus has seemed so thoroughly joined to the instrument. Mingus, who had a beat like a wrecking ball and a temperament to match, bent the bass to his will, but Haden has bent his will to the instrument's. (Mingus, who was bad with names, used to call him "Bass," which Haden took as an honorific.)

Like the saxophone, though older by some 300 years (a prototype has been traced to the mid sixteenth century), the double bass—or contrabass, or bass violin—has become more closely identified with jazz than with the symphonic literature for which it was intended. In classical music the string bass is usually limited to shadowing the cellos at the bottom of the octave or to delivering, in more recent compositions, a series of arrhythmic pizzicato thumps to signal that a piece is atonal or otherwise "modern."

In jazz no other instrument is more essential. A common misconception about jazz is that drummers keep time, like conductors with two sticks instead of one. Drummers do control tempo, which is quite a different matter from time, and they supply color and momentum with their accents and punctuations. But the job of actually keeping a beat (or implying one, as the case may be) ordinarily falls to a group's string-bass player, and the group isn't going to swing unless his notes suggest a heartbeat rather than a

metronome. The “walking” bass line—four equal beats to the measure in step-like motion, as perfected by Walter Page, with the Count Basie Orchestra, in the late 1930s—has become a trademark of modern jazz, what people tap a foot to when they think they’re tapping to the drums.

A bass line of whatever sort—walking in time or running free of it—serves a second vital purpose in jazz. Since the 1930s, and especially since bebop in the late 1940s, much jazz improvisation has been guided, though not necessarily dictated, by harmonic progressions or chord changes. Spelling out the chords is the bass player’s other responsibility, and his choice of notes and accuracy of pitch are thus as important to a band’s well-being as his ability to lay down a flowing beat. The bass line is the thread that connects improvised solos to an underlying harmonic framework—a backbone as well as a heartbeat.

Bebop relieved drummers and pianists of regular timekeeping—but only because bass players continued to tend the beat, their job becoming more demanding than ever because of bebop’s great harmonic complexity. The first radical departure after bebop was free jazz, a movement that became recognizable in the late fall of 1959, with the arrival in New York of the Ornette Coleman Quartet for a highly publicized extended engagement at a club called the Five Spot. Coleman frequently dispensed with chord changes and regular meter. If this sounds like a ticket to the races for a bass player, quite the opposite was true: harmony still mattered in Coleman’s music, and a good beat mattered more than ever, even though it might not always have been where the foot expected it to be. Fortunately for Coleman—and for jazz as it has evolved in the forty years since—he found in Haden a bass player who sensed that the only thing worse than falling back on the old rules would be to assume that all rules were out.

“With Ornette, there was no piano, but I became the piano,” Haden told me last fall, over a leisurely breakfast in the dining room of his New York hotel. “I had to learn right away how to improvise behind Ornette, which not only meant following him from one key to another and recognizing the different keys, but modulating in a way that the keys flowed in and out of each other and the new harmonies sounded right. I really welcomed the challenge, because it meant using my ear, like when I

was singing country music with my family on the radio as a child in the Midwest, and I had to know all the harmony parts—mine and everybody else’s—if we were going to blend. There was no such thing as ‘I don’t know them.’ You had to know them.”

HADEN’S background is an unusual one for a jazz musician. In the late 1930s the Hadens were a country-music act like their friends the Carter Family, but famous only within reach of the 50,000-watt radio station in Shenandoah, Iowa, that carried their live broadcasts twice daily. The family made personal appearances at revival meetings and county fairs, but they were hardly in show business. “We’d wake up at four A.M., milk the cows, and then do the show,” Haden recalled, describing the family’s daily routine after starting a farm near Springfield, Missouri, and beginning a program for a station there. “The station put all the equipment we needed in our living room,” he told me. “You’d ring the studio, they’d ring back, and we’d be on the air.”

According to a family legend, Charlie, the youngest of the four Haden children, was musical practically from the cradle. He made his debut on the program in 1939, when he was twenty-two months old, after his mother heard him humming along with her lullabies and trying to harmonize with his sister and brothers as they practiced their hymns and folk songs for the radio.

Haden remained on the program until he was fifteen, when he contracted polio, which weakened nerves in his face and throat and put an end to his singing career. (Even today there are people who know nothing of his place in jazz but for whom his name as a child who once sang on the radio rings a bell.) By 1955 he was already the house bass player on *Ozark Jubilee*, a network television show produced in Springfield and hosted by the singer Red Foley. Musicians frequently choose instruments similar in character to their speaking voices, but Haden speaks in a light, melodic tenor with sudden increases in vibrato that one writer has attributed to the polio.

The bass violin comes in various sizes, the most common ones being three-quarters and seven-eighths (of full size); Haden has one of each, and the larger of the two—one of a small number of basses made in the mid nineteenth century by a French luthier named Jean-Baptiste Vuil-

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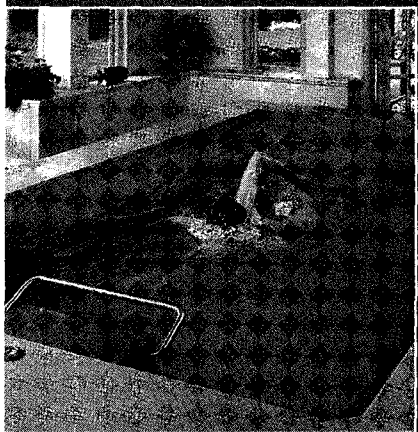
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laume—is his prize possession. He plays it only at recording sessions and jobs close to home, for fear of damaging it in transit. “Vuillaume was one of the only luthiers elsewhere in Europe to come close to the Italian varnish,” he explained. “The varnish, that’s the secret, along with the wood and the artistry of the instrument maker.”

Bass players themselves tend to come in two sizes: tall and lean, with long arms that entwine the instrument; or built close to the ground, with enough heft in their sound to make up for what they might lack in reach. Haden is exceptional for being of average height and weight. (He lost twenty pounds following the removal of his gall bladder, in 1998.) Unassuming despite his designer eyeglasses and stylishly short hair and dark clothing, he has the look of an intense man whom middle age has gradually persuaded to relax.

Over breakfast Haden, who lives in Santa Monica, California, with his wife, the singer Ruth Cameron, talked about suffering from tinnitus (a persistent ringing in both ears), which he attributes to having played an especially tumultuous version of free jazz with the tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp and the trombonist Roswell Rudd in the late 1960s) and hyperacousis (extreme sensitivity to loud noises), a condition that obliges him to position himself behind Plexiglas baffles when playing with a drummer. He talked about starting the jazz studies program at the California Institute of the Arts in 1982, where his students have included such up-and-coming musicians as the tenor saxophonist Ravi Coltrane, the trumpeter Ralph Alessi, and the bass player Scott Colley. He spoke with pride about his four children, three of whom have made a splash in pop music: his son, Josh, with the group Spain, and his daughters Rachel and Petra, with the group That Dog.

Our conversation kept returning to Haden’s childhood. To hear Haden reminisce, one might think that his choice of instrument was determined by a boyhood crush on one of the Carter sisters and by a rivalry with his late brother, Jim, an avid bebop fan who also became a professional bass player. But what really seems to have drawn Haden to the instrument, to judge from what he told me, was his keen ear for harmony and his fascination with the bass voice. “I used to listen to a lot of Bach on the radio,” he said, “and when the basses started to sing, it made everything complete—it made it all make sense.”

Haden’s grandmother used to tell him she saw Wild Bill Hickok shoot a man for stealing his watch. Though not nearly as colorful, Haden’s own story of first laying eyes on Ornette Coleman, in a Los Angeles nightclub in 1957, also has the air of legend. “I think Gerry Mulligan was playing at the Haig, and it was my night off from my gig at the Hillcrest with Paul Bley, so I went over there,” Haden told me. “The place was packed, and this guy with long hair like nobody wore it in those days asked if he could sit in. He took out this plastic alto saxophone and started playing, and the whole room lit up for me. But as soon as he started to play, they made him stop. He put his horn back in his case and left. I tried to run after him through the mob of people, but when I got to the door, he had disappeared.”

Some musicians were leery of Coleman even before hearing him play that plastic saxophone, which must have looked like a toy compared with the metal ones they were used to. But Haden was from the Ozarks, where nobody thought it particularly odd for a left-hander like Haden’s father to play guitar wrong side up, or for Haden’s grandfather to play a fiddle while holding it against his chest.

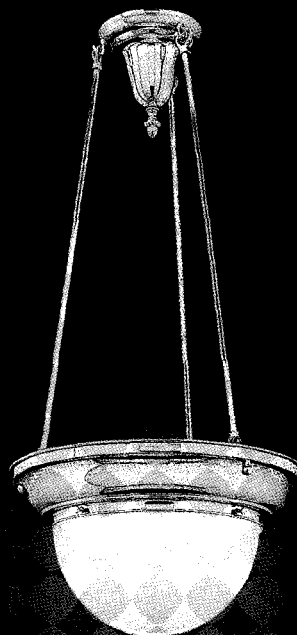
Asking around, Haden learned Coleman’s identity from the drummer Lennie McBrowne, a fellow member of Bley’s band at the Hillcrest. McBrowne brought Coleman to the club. “Ornette was sitting at one of the tables, and I told him I had heard him the other night and how beautiful I thought he sounded. He thanked me and said that not many people told him that, and asked if I wanted to hang out and play. We went to this little room he had. He had just broken up with his wife, and there was music all over the place, all over the dressers and all over the floor. He picked some music off the floor and said, ‘Let’s play this.’ He said, ‘There are changes underneath the melody that I was hearing when I wrote this, but you should listen to what I’m doing and make up your own.’ I was scared to death that I wouldn’t play right, but he loved what I was doing and we played all day. Then we took a break for some hamburgers and went back to his place and played all night.”

Coleman and an acolyte, Don Cherry, wound up joining Haden in Bley’s band at the Hillcrest, which was a musician’s hangout. Bley, a pianist whose approach was experimental to begin with, once

joked that you could tell when the band was playing a set, because most of the audience would be standing around outside waiting for it to end. This negative response puzzled Haden: "Only the improvisations were new. Ornette's tunes, and our arrangements of them, were so precise they stopped on a dime. It was amazing to me that more musicians didn't respond to this immediately." Artists in other disciplines did, however. When Coleman opened at the Five Spot with Haden, Cherry, and the drummer Billy Higgins, "it was packed every night, not just with musicians trying to figure it out, like in L.A., but with painters and writers and poets." On any given night the audience might include Willem de Kooning or Larry Rivers.

Around this time Haden began playing with his eyes shut, a habit he says helps him to rid his mind of passing thoughts and concentrate on the music—although his original reason was that he was intimidated by looking out and seeing "every great bass player in New York, including Mingus, Percy Heath, Wilbur Ware, Paul Chambers, and Henry Grimes, staring me right in the face." Once, he opened his eyes and there was Leonard Bernstein, practically on the bandstand, his ear an inch away from Haden's bass. Bernstein was astute: he sensed that contrary to what people were saying, Coleman's music was not atonal or even bitonal. He knew where to listen for its tonal center.

In New York in the late 1960s Haden was sometimes the only white musician on the bandstand, as the avant-garde movement that had been given impetus by Coleman at the Five Spot became increasingly identified with black separatism. Amid much militant rhetoric and posturing before sympathetic mixed audiences, Haden was practically alone in voicing his political beliefs within earshot of authorities who could punish him. During a tour of Europe with Coleman in 1971 he was detained by the police at the Lisbon airport and questioned for more than five hours about having dedicated—before an audience of 10,000 people—a performance of "Song for Ché" to independence movements in the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea. (Jazz critics in Portugal regard him as something of a folk hero to this day.) One suspects that Haden's politics are more intuitive than ideological, born out of an identification with the underdog that be-

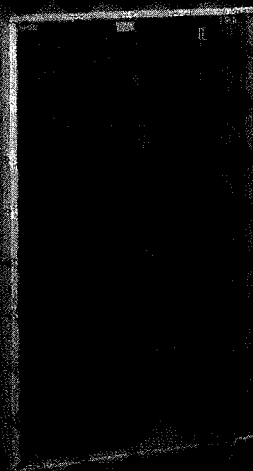


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gan when he saw the raw deal given tenant farmers—black and white alike—in the country near Springfield. He told me about the connection he sees between country music and jazz: “One is the music of poor whites, and the other grew out of black slaves’ struggle for freedom.” In addition to his song for Guevara, Haden’s four Liberation Music Orchestra albums have included numbers written by him in tribute to, or adopted from folk songs associated with, the Chilean resistance, the Salvadoran rebels, the African National Congress, and the volunteers who fought on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War.

Yet the mood of these albums has been jubilant and lyrical rather than strident. The first LMO album was historically significant for bringing the most daring improvisational aspects of free jazz into an orchestral framework at a time when the new style was thought to be suitable only for small groups. Haden is fond of pointing out that each of the orchestra’s albums was recorded during a Republican Administration. Owing to the staggering costs of maintaining a big band, the LMO has been on hold since 1992, and Haden doesn’t know whether he will reconvene the band for another album anytime soon. “If Bush gets elected, I’ll have to,” he said, not wholly joking.

NO band in jazz has a stronger sense of place than Quartet West—the place being Los Angeles in the period immediately after World War II, the Los Angeles that Haden just missed on arriving there in 1957. Formed in 1986, the band settled into its identity with *Haunted Heart*, its third album, recorded in 1991. The title tune is a gorgeous ballad from the 1940s, written by Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz and rarely played by jazz musicians, despite a memorable recording by Bill Evans in 1961. Just as the track seems about to fade out, after the tenor saxophonist Ernie Watts’s glowing recapitulation of the theme, a twinkle of strings introduces Jo Stafford’s 1947 recording of the song, which is heard in its entirety, slight surface noise and all.

Deliberately evocative of Hollywood movies of the 1940s (it even begins with Max Steiner’s Warner Bros. fanfare), *Haunted Heart* reminds me of a line spoken by Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade at the end of *The Maltese Falcon*, when a cop asks him about the jeweled bird everybody’s been scheming to get hold

of. It’s “the stuff that dreams are made of,” Bogart wisecracks, referring to the falcon and also thinking of the double-crossing woman he loves—and whom he has just handed over to the police.

Given Haden’s political leanings and his founding role in the jazz avant-garde, the last thing anyone expected from him was a love of singers and songs that are often dismissed as exemplars of middle-of-the-road escapism. Inevitably, there was speculation among jazz fans that this new direction reflected Haden’s more relaxed lifestyle in Malibu, where he and his wife live in a rented house with an expansive view of the Pacific Ocean. The recordings he used on *Haunted Heart* by Stafford, Jeri Southern, and Billie Holiday—ghostlike, appearing suddenly, as though from memory—may call on emotions more refined than those triggered by the field recordings from Cuba and South Africa that he occasionally used with the Liberation Music Orchestra. But Haden brings his usual passion to Quartet West.

Haden’s vision of the 1940s recognizes the beginning of modernism in jazz. Along with lush forties pop ballads and lilting originals by Haden or Alan Broadbent, the group’s pianist, in the same mood, the band has recorded some of the trickiest of up-tempo early-bebop numbers by Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, and Lennie Tristano, among others. And Quartet West is one of only a few contemporary jazz bands to capture early bebop’s angular geometrics and emotional undercurrents, along with its stylish drum accents and lickety-split tempos. Parker and Dizzy Gillespie gave Los Angeles its first taste of bebop when they played a club called Billy Berg’s at the end of 1945. At the same time, Bogart was preparing to play Philip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*, a movie Haden says he tries to watch at least once a month; when he plays with Quartet West, it’s as though Haden were imagining Parker and Marlowe prowling the Hollywood streets with him there beside them.

The Art of the Song, recorded last year, keeps a string orchestra, which Haden added to the band for the 1995 album *Now Is the Hour*, and also features the live vocalists Bill Henderson and Shirley Horn. Horn, sounding much more animated than she has when singing with her own trio in recent years, is especially wonderful on Cy Coleman’s “I’m Gonna Laugh You

Right Out of My Life.” Henderson also performs capably, even if his slower-than-molasses delivery of “You, My Love,” from the 1954 movie *Young at Heart*, is unlikely to make anyone forget Frank Sinatra. But without the voices from the past and without some bebop as a change of pace, the only frisson comes at the end of the album, when Haden steps out of character to sing “Wayfaring Stranger”—a folk song his mother occasionally sang, and one whose grim lyrics, accepting death as a prelude to the afterlife, are typical of the songs Haden performed on the radio as a child. The Hadens’ theme song was the Carter Family favorite “Keep on the Sunny Side of Life,” but nothing else they sang was as cheery. On “Wayfaring Stranger,” Broadbent scores the strings in intervals of fifths, which give the impression of being much wider because of Haden’s uncertainty as a singer. Sounding as if he is walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Haden never seems as sure of himself as he would if he were playing the same notes on bass. But all the notes land exactly where they belong, in perfect relationship to one another harmonically. Baring his soul, Haden also displays his innate musicality.

THE nuts and bolts of what remains their primary job—minding both pulse and chord changes—keeps bass players relatively unpretentious, even when, like Haden, they enjoy respect as soloists and bandleaders. Everyone has some vanity, though, and for the typical modern bass player this expresses itself in the belief that he is entitled to a solo on every number, just as if he were playing piano or a horn. (Decades of prattle about jazz as an example of democracy in action have taken their toll.) Jimmy Blanton was the first to suggest the instrument’s solo potential, with Duke Ellington’s band in the early 1940s. Two decades later Scott LaFaro added a few twists as a member of the Bill Evans Trio. And the most compelling of all bass soloists was Charles Mingus, who had the facility of a Casals or a Segovia and a dramatic presence unlike anyone else’s. But in most hands bass solos are a recipe for boredom, if only because of the instrument’s pinched dynamics. After a succession of horn solos even the fleetest and most artfully conceived bass solo risks being anticlimactic. Haden is a bass soloist with a recognizable sensibility as well as technical range. His

most celebrated recorded solo—among the most celebrated by any bass player—is the one he played on “Ramblin’” with Ornette Coleman in 1959. Fingering the instrument briskly but spacing his musical lines so that the silences between them carried as much meaning as the notes, Haden drew on his own background and underlined the country flavor of Coleman’s tune by quoting snatches of folk songs he remembered from Missouri, including “Old Joe Clark,” “Fort Worth Jail,” and “Jesse James.”

Haden usually favors a more deliberate pace, and he rarely quotes. Jazz musicians know, even if many in their audience do not, that slow tempos can be more demanding than breakneck ones; Haden has what I’ve heard musicians praise as a “long” beat, meaning the ability to sustain rhythmic vitality at a relative crawl. Artists whose deviations from the norm initially shock others in their discipline often turn out to be throwbacks of a sort. This was true of Coleman, who restored a primal cry to jazz and rid it of bebop’s harmonic clutter, and it is true of Haden, who has gone on insisting that a bass is a bass even as other players have tried to convince themselves that it can be a horn or an oversized cello or guitar.

In a bid for greater velocity and carrying power, most jazz bass players long ago switched from gut strings to steel; Haden still uses gut strings, which vibrate more deeply but not as loudly. Half the battle for any bass player is being heard over horns and drums, and this is why most of them now attach electric pickups to their instruments. After years of experimentation Haden uses a specially designed pickup, which he says “amplifies the sound of the bass—not the sound of the amplifier it’s plugged into, which usually has its own personality.” He wishes he could forgo amplification altogether, but with the sound levels on all instruments turned up unreasonably high in clubs and concert halls today, the price would be not being able to hear himself, let alone be heard.

When I spoke with Haden, he was in New York to play duets with the pianist Kenny Barron at a garish club called Iridium. Duets have been a Haden specialty since the late 1970s, when he released two albums of them with different partners, including Coleman, the pianist Keith Jarrett, and the drummer Paul Motian. “There’s a vulnerability to duets, because you’re so

exposed,” Haden told me. “You can hear the musicians’ fingerprints.” With Barron the most impressive aspect of Haden’s solos was his sense of continuity in moving back and forth from traditional accompaniment to freestanding improvisation. Tempos never stopped dead during his solos, the way they often do when bass players have the floor to themselves. The most handsomely carved of his solos were on the neglected standard “For Heaven’s Sake,” and his own “Our Spanish Love Song,” a lilting melody that one suspects was not written from the bottom up, with the chords coming first—the method employed by many bass players out of sheer habit. Though Haden draws on a vocabulary of slides and drones and double stops common to all modern-jazz bass players, what sets him apart is the deep penetration of his notes, his flair for melody, and his gravitas. As on his vocal recording of “Wayfaring Stranger,” there is more shadow than sunshine in Haden’s bass solos—a tacit acknowledgment of impermanence in the way he sometimes lets a note resonate and then decay, without rushing to fill the silence with another one.

Watching Haden play, one might think that he and his bass were engaged in a danse macabre. Most bass players lean the instrument against a shoulder to relieve the stress of holding it upright with one hand for as much as an hour at a time, or turn it toward them at a forty-five-degree angle for easier reach. Haden starts off with the bass turned toward him, but moves around so much as he plays that he often winds up doubled over, with his neck bent or holding the bass an arm’s length away and looking in the opposite direction—a position that requires an absurdly long reach and puts a strain on his neck and shoulders. Though he speaks of improvisation as if it were an out-of-body experience, his body has paid a price: he has had recurring back problems, and various doctors and chiropractors have suggested that he try sitting down or at least keeping still when he plays. “But it’s too late to change,” he told me between his sets with Barron. “One of the things you can’t do when you’re playing is think,” he added, “because once the thought process starts, the spontaneity begins to suffer.” At the end of his last number with Barron, Haden and his bass were turned the same way and were some distance apart—facing the audience and leaning slightly forward, as if acknowledging applause meant for both of them. ♪

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From the Streets to the Piste

Almost half the fencers on the U.S. Olympic team are African-Americans from the inner city—all students of one remarkable man

THIS could have been Peter Westbrook's whole story: A young black man born into vicious poverty discovers fencing, a sport typically the domain of upper-class whites. He masters the saber, wins an athletic scholarship to New York University, gains a spot on the U.S. Olympic team for the first time in

1976, and takes a bronze medal in the Los Angeles Games in 1984, becoming only the second American sabreur ever to earn an Olympic medal.

by Jeff Hull

By the time he retires from competition, in 1996, he has dominated American fencing for twenty years, qualifying for six U.S. Olympic teams—an achievement only three other

fencers can claim. His would be a remarkable story—a classic American sports tale—even if it ended there.

But the heart of Westbrook's story lies not in his own success, or in the perseverance and sacrifice behind it. The heart of his story lies in Keeth and Erinn Smart and Akhi Spencer-El—young African-Americans who learned fencing from Westbrook, free of charge, and who make up almost half of the squad that will fence for the United States at this summer's Olympic Games, in Sydney. It lies in the many students from the inner city who crowd around him every Saturday morning for lessons at the New York Fencing Club, courtesy of a nonprofit foundation that Westbrook has run single-handedly since 1991.

Peter Westbrook was born in 1952, to a mixed-race family that was struggling to survive amid the bleakness and violence of the Hayes Homes housing project, in Newark, New Jersey. His father

was African-American, his mother Japanese—a heritage that in the wake of World War II and the Korean War earned Westbrook repeated beatings at the hands of his peers. At home he watched his father batter his mother, until one day his father simply left.

A life in the projects was not what Mariko Westbrook, the daughter of a Japanese bureaucrat, had bargained for when she defied her father, married a black GI, and left her country forever. And it was not a life she wanted for her son. By the time he was fourteen, she had mapped out his escape. To persuade him to go along, she resorted to anecdotes about her ancestry—and to bribery. “Five bucks,” Peter Westbrook says. “My mother could trace her lineage back through many samurai. This was a source of great honor, great pride. For her, fencing was a sport of nobles. She thought, If I get Peter into fencing, he’ll meet noble people. But it wasn’t all that stuff about her family that got me interested. She told me she’d give me five dollars if I took a fencing lesson.”

Westbrook took his first lesson, at Essex Catholic High School, from a fencer named Samuel D’Ambola. “The first time I held a sword, I thought, Wow, I’m a sword fighter,” he says. “This is *bad*. If I get in trouble, this will help me kick some butt.” Westbrook was already a fighter: he boxed in the Police Athletic League and scrapped in the streets. But fencing is also an intellectual battle, and Westbrook quickly mastered the art of strategizing several moves ahead of his opponents. Meanwhile, his mother cleaned bathrooms and washed floors at the local Catholic grammar school, so that Westbrook could study at Essex and keep fencing. He quickly became one of the best high school fencers in New Jersey, and drew the attention of recruiters from NYU, who offered him a full athletic scholarship. Suddenly he found himself in a world dramatically different from Hayes Homes. “It was culture shock, being among all those white people five days a week,” he says. “I just wasn’t used to that.”

THE New York Fencing Club sits atop a five-story building in Chelsea, in lower Manhattan. At most fencing salles in this country, when the action ceases and the face masks are peeled back, the faces are almost without exception white. Here the faces are primarily

black, though there are Latino and Asian and white students, too. On a bitter Saturday morning last February some eighty Westbrook Foundation students ranging in age from nine to twenty-one streamed into the salle. Some had been in transit for an hour or more, having taken buses and trains across town.

Eyes gleaming with energy, they formed neat lines and began working through calisthenics and footwork drills. This is the part of practice that most fencers hate: the rote conditioning, the boring warm-ups. Westbrook’s students worked out with barely contained glee. One girl gasped, “This is like coming to boot camp.” But there was pride, not resentment, in her voice—and she shows up every Saturday for more.

Westbrook’s frame is not much larger than those of most of his students. He is slender and lithe, with an incongruous wad of muscles high on his right forearm. His legs are slightly bowed; he moves in quick, precise steps. He has a round face, a high forehead, and piercing eyes. Once the warm-up ended, the students gathered in a semicircle at his feet.

Although the Westbrook Foundation is a fencing program, it is fundamentally about education and character. Each student must write an essay every other month, generally on a topic of his or her choice. On Saturday mornings Westbrook and his students spend a half hour or so discussing the essays, and sometimes talking about schoolwork or report cards as well.

The students endure all of this because they want what follows. They want the swords, the action—“the cheese,” Westbrook calls it. They sit through a short lecture as well, containing life lessons couched as fencing adventures. This morning there were two such lessons—one aimed at encouraging girls to enter sports, the other about overcoming jealousy and striving to be genuinely happy for the success of others.

Westbrook seemed to sense exactly how much the students would absorb. Soon he released them, and they bounded to their feet, donning masks and jackets and clustering in groups according to weapon and ability. Nine-year-old girls jabbed at each other with épées; teenage boys swung sabers at their friends’ heads. Westbrook moved among the dueling pairs, exhorting them in terms of pure combat. “I’m looking for war-

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rriors," he cried. "I don't want chumps. You've got to destroy your opponents. This is war!"

In any fencing competition the goal is to strike your opponent with your sword. In bouts using *épées* or foils—slim thrusting weapons with blunt tips and no cutting edges—only blows with the tip of the sword are counted as "touches." Saber touches can be scored with either the tip or the sharp edge of the blade, anywhere on the opponent's body from the waist up—a nod to the weapon's history, where in a cavalry soldier would strive to kill an opponent without injuring his horse, a valuable spoil of war. Modern fencers begin a match by taking their marks face-to-face on a strip of matting—the *piste*—clad in full face masks, metallic jackets called *lamés*, gloves, and tights. The equipment is wired to record touches electronically. The motion of a bout is mainly forward and backward, with one fencer advancing to the other's retreat. Each time a touch is scored, the fencers return to their marks to begin again. Fifteen touches wins a bout.

Westbrook's plan for his students is hardly complicated: Let them belong to something, and show them what it takes to remain. Hook them on the action, the adrenaline, the flash and grace. Pay attention to them. Praise them. But don't let them play unless they write their essays, unless they've done their schoolwork, unless they listen to the lectures. Then show them more.

Show them, for instance, Keeth and Erinn Smart and Akhi Spencer-El. All three got their start at Westbrook's Saturday-morning sessions and moved on to an after-school program run by the foundation. Each year Westbrook selects thirty or so of his most promising Saturday students to attend the after-school program, where they receive one-on-one instruction from internationally renowned coaches and competitors, including fencing masters from Ukraine, Hungary, and Cuba—nations that dominate the sport. The foundation pays the instructors' salaries, equips the athletes, and provides money for travel to competitions—all on a shoestring budget of around \$170,000 a year, which Westbrook raises on his own. Donors range from the United States Olympic Committee to the Philip Morris corporation to Bill Cosby. The students must chip in something, but their contributions—nev-

er more than \$20 a year—are purely symbolic, intended to teach them the value of investing in themselves.

Those investments are clearly paying off. Erinn Smart, age twenty, will be one of the women representing the U.S. Olympic fencing team in foil. She flies to competitions in Europe every other week or so, and is a student at Barnard College. Her brother Keeth, age twenty-one, is currently the top-ranked American sabreur. He attends St. John's University on a full scholarship. Keeth Smart has traveled to World Cup tournaments in Hungary, France, Italy, Russia, Germany, and Cuba, gaining experience for this summer's games in Sydney. Competitive and athletic from an early age, the Smarts were the first fencers to join Westbrook: their parents brought them to the foundation on the day it opened.

Akhi Spencer-El—who also has been offered a scholarship to St. John's—is a less likely star. By the age of sixteen he was spending his afternoons drinking on street corners with drug-dealing friends; he nearly flunked out of high school. Spencer-El came to fencing at the urging of his mother, an acquaintance of Westbrook's, when he was fourteen. He struggled with destructive behavior even after joining the foundation, and some of the instructors wanted Westbrook to evict him from the after-school program. But Westbrook saw his potential and persevered, and Spencer-El responded by becoming the first American fencer ever to achieve a No. 1 world ranking: he topped the under-twenty division in 1998, only six years into his fencing career. Although he has a commanding physique, his mind is the key to his success. "He's always thinking four, five, or six moves ahead," Westbrook says. "He plays chess with his body."

Spencer-El is also a sabreur; he and Keeth Smart may have to compete against each other in Sydney. The top-ranked male sabreurs at the games will be two Russians, Stanislav Pozdniakov and Sergei Charikov, and a Frenchman, Damien Touya; the Italians and the Hungarians will also field strong teams. The Americans are decidedly not among the favorites: Keeth Smart currently ranks forty-ninth in the world. A medal win by Smart or Spencer-El would be a phenomenal upset. Erinn Smart will be competing only in the team portion of her event; her teammates will include Iris Zimmer-

man, a three-time women's world champion in foil.

Westbrook wants Spencer-El and the Smarts in his class on Saturday mornings: their example is the most powerful lesson he can offer. Harvey Miller, a lanky eighteen-year-old African-American from Queens, is proof. Like Spencer-El, Miller used to spend most of his time hanging out on the streets or playing hoops. His father left the family long ago. By the time Miller was in high school, he seemed poised to share the fate of one of his friends, a gang member who had been shot in the head. During his sophomore year he failed every class except one: phys. ed. When his mother heard a radio feature about a fencing program run by a black man, through which black kids were winning college scholarships, she sat her son down. "It's boot camp or fencing," she said. "Choose."

One Saturday at the fencing club Miller watched an exhibition bout between Keeth Smart and Spencer-El. "I saw their speed," he recalls. "They were so graceful." The next Saturday he fought a practice saber bout against a boy who was ranked eleventh in the country in his age group. Miller won the match, and then defeated an older boy as well. "Tell you the truth, I think they let me beat them," he says, "because they knew I'd get hooked."

Westbrook fenced with Miller and recognized that he had an unusual aptitude for the sport. He encouraged Miller to join the after-school coaching sessions; Miller thrived on the attention and discipline. Eighteen months after he first picked up a fencing weapon, Miller won the U.S. Junior Olympic Championship in the saber class. "It blew our minds," Westbrook says, "but I'm far more impressed by what he's done with his life."

Miller fences four afternoons a week and on Saturdays. He made his high school's honor roll. He went to night school to make up the courses he previously failed, and finished an SAT preparatory class; he will be going to St. John's in the fall. Four years ago Miller didn't know what computer science was. Now he's determined to earn a master's degree in it.

Westbrook wants Miller to address the other students one of these Saturdays. "He complains, 'Naw, Pete. I don't want to do that,'" Westbrook says with a laugh. "But it's important for him to do it. It will help the other kids, and it will help him

to reflect on what he's doing with his life. Verbalize it and express it; that helps all of us to understand it a little more. What he's doing in fencing is exactly what he's doing in life."

PETER Westbrook understands from experience that unique talents lie buried in the kids wandering the streets of New York. He describes his own drive as "running away from inner demons, like being poor and black and not having a father and living in the projects." He knows that poverty breeds fighters, and he understands the inherent anger that makes them fight. Westbrook knew that if he could channel this rage to the piste, he could produce world-class athletes, and especially champion sabreurs. Fencing is, after all, a martial sport, and saber is the most aggressive of the fencing disciplines. Foil and épée consist primarily of stabbing thrusts delivered with finesse and grace. Saber consists of the visceral slashing and slicing of Zorro and Blackbeard; it was sabreurs whom Tennyson's raw language celebrated in "The Charge of the Light Brigade."

The saber evolved from the curved scimitars of the Persians. It arrived in Europe in the sixteenth century, brought to Hungary by invading Turks. Historical evidence suggests that a form of fencing was practiced in Egypt as early as 1180 B.C. However, the origin of modern fencing is generally dated to the fourteenth century, when the debut of firearms in battle ended the use of heavy armor—it was no defense against bullets—and opened the field to extensive swordplay. Initially the weapons of choice were various types of straight swords, including thrusting swords that could pierce light armor. The Hussar cavalry introduced saber fighting to the rest of Europe in the eighteenth century, providing the brutal lesson that the saber could deliver devastating wounds with less strength than some other swords required.

A modern saber bout consists of cautious stalking punctuated with flurries of blows. The sequences of action are truncated and violent. The discipline demands an explosive energy, and a hefty amount of attitude as well. "Saber people have big mouths," Westbrook says. "They're like boxers or hundred-meter sprinters. It's the adrenaline; it's juice and spark. You need that personality. Inner-city kids are so slick, so competitive. It's a natural fit."

THERE is a fencing term, "choice in time," that has to do with the precise moment when a competitor finds his opponent neither physically nor psychologically able to defend against an attack. Such instants occur repeatedly throughout a bout, created by the precise degree of the fencers' movements, by speed, by position, by timing. A fencer who recognizes the instant when an attack can succeed is said to make a positive choice in time. One who makes a movement that results in an opening for his opponent makes a negative choice in time.

"In time" concerns rhythm. It is borrowed from music, as is much of the language of fencing. Fencers refer to a completed series of actions—thrust, parry, riposte, remise, for instance—as a "phrase." A competitor's "tempo" is the pace at which he attacks or reacts. Tempo is what sets Harvey Miller's style apart. "Harvey can go slow and still hit you," Westbrook says. "He's not crazy fast, he's not crazy slow, he just has perfect timing. He has a monkey tempo—such an unusual rhythm that there's nothing you can do."

Westbrook introduces his students to the language and history of their sport gradually, letting the action speak first. Although he takes great satisfaction in the accomplishments of Miller and the other champions he has trained, Westbrook knows that the true measure of his success must encompass the hundreds of Saturday-morning fencers who will never get closer to the Olympic Games than a TV screen. "The kids on Saturday might get more than the kids in the after-school program," Westbrook says. "They don't even know what they're getting, but it's more than fencing. They come to belong, to be part of something, part of a family. You have to let each one of these kids know that they have something special."

"It's almost impossible for inner-city kids not to get involved in negative things, because ninety percent of the stimuli in the community are negative," he says. "In the suburbs, or in small towns, kids have to make a bad choice for things to go wrong. Here they have to go out of their way to make something good happen." Every Saturday morning in the fencing salle Westbrook goes out of his way to help his students make something good happen—to help them make positive choices in time. ☞

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An Irresistible Long-winded Bore

*John Cowper Powys wrote about
“the three incomprehensibles”: sex, religion,
and nature. And wrote. And wrote*

SOME years ago, in the slate-quarrying village of Blaenau Ffestiniog, Wales, I visited Phyllis Playter, the longtime companion of the writer John Cowper Powys.

She was a tiny, ancient woman whose skin was stretched like parchment over her bones. I asked her how she had met

Powys. She said, “It was in Joplin, Missouri, in 1921, and Mr. Powys was lecturing on Dostoevski. The lecture was so powerful that three people in the audience fainted. I knew he was the man for me.”

I fell for Powys myself, although not quite in the same way. In college I was fed

a steady diet of professor-friendly, eminently deconstructible texts, many of them seemingly written for the purposes of classroom exegesis. I yearned, if not for stronger stuff, at least for less-polite stuff; acting on a tip in Henry Miller’s *The Books in My Life*, I began reading Powys. I started with a 1929 novel called *Wolf Solent*, because I thought it might be about wolves, possibly in the manner of Jack London. It couldn’t have been less so. It concerns an extremely introverted man, Wolf Solent, and his courtship of two very different women. The supporting cast includes a lecherous sausage-maker, a peddler of antiquarian pornography, a homosexual clergyman, a voyeuristic country squire, a teenage boy who kisses trees, and a mad poet. Here, I thought, is God’s weird plenty.

What struck me when I reread *Wolf Solent* recently was not its weirdness but its compassion for the down-and-out, the aberrant, and the misbegotten. What also struck me was its casual attitude toward polymorphous sex. “Natural or unnatural,” one of the characters says, “it’s nature. It’s mortal man’s one great solace before he’s annihilated.” I can’t imagine anyone else of Powys’s generation writing those words. Certainly not D. H. Lawrence, who compared with Powys was a reactionary about matters of the flesh.

One doesn’t read Powys so much as enlist in him. *Wolf Solent* is more than 900 pages long. Two later novels, *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Porius*, are well over a thousand (in hardcover they would make formidable weapons). Even the shorter novels invite the description that Henry James applied to novels by Tolstoy, Thackeray, and Dumas: “loose, baggy monsters.” Powys had mixed feelings about James; when asked about a writer he did like, he would often mention Homer, and sometimes Sir Walter Scott. His own writing is epic, grandiose, often wildly rhetorical, and probably undeconstructible. He could be guilty of absurdities, as when he described the departure of Tom Barter’s soul from his dead body in *A Glastonbury Romance*. And yet Powys was also capable of exquisite moments, as when, in the same novel, a drowning John Geard can think of “snuffing up the sweet sweat of those he loved.”

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"A great modern novel consists of and ought to include just everything," Powys wrote in his novel *Dostoevsky*. In including just about everything, he was a maximalist writer in an increasingly minimalist age. I can think of no equivalent to him among subsequent writers except, perhaps, Patrick White, who, like Powys, both seeks the transcendent in the ordinary and occasionally spins his wheels in trying to corner such an elusive quarry. But White received a Nobel Prize. Powys received no prizes other than a bronze plaque from the Hamburg Free Academy of the Arts, a few years before his death.

TO some readers, John Cowper Powys is a long-winded, bombastic bore and an almost pathological celebrant of oddball sex and chthonic realms. To most, he is an unknown quantity. His name seldom comes up in discussions of that dreary academic figment known as The Novel, and a number of well-read people of my acquaintance have never heard of him. Over the years, he's had some reputable allies—Henry Miller, Robertson Davies, Angus Wilson, George Steiner, Iris Murdoch, J. B. Priestley, Elias Canetti, and Philip Larkin, who referred to Powys as a "gigantic mythopoeic literary volcano." But he remains, in the phrase of Martin Amis, "a monument of neglect."

Perhaps if he'd been a member of a fashionable literary movement like the Bloomsbury group, he might have achieved more recognition. But I have difficulty imagining a man who described himself as "a born Camp-Fire or Cave-Fire Story-Teller" sitting down for tea with Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf. In fact, Powys avoided literary company; he would no sooner have taken part in a writer's conference than in a gathering of morticians. A triumphant solitary, he also avoided nonliterary company. He didn't serve in the Great War, because he had a phobia about urinating in public—or so he says in his *Autobiography* (1934). With Powys it's sometimes hard to tell whether he was pulling the reader's leg or pulling his own.

Yet he did belong to at least one literary group—his family. Of his ten siblings, six ended up writing books. Theodore, who is probably the best known of these siblings, wrote short stories and novels, among them *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*;

Llewelyn wrote rather florid nature essays and memoirs; Philippa wrote a novel and poems; Littleton wrote autobiographies; and Bertie wrote about architecture. All together, the hardworking Powyses produced more than a hundred books.

Born in 1872 in Derbyshire, England, the son of a vicar, John Cowper had a typical middle-class upbringing that shuttled him methodically from his father's vicarage to Sherborne School, Cambridge, and from there to a career as a country schoolmaster. Then, in 1904, he did something wholly atypical: he traveled to America and turned an innate talent for the histrionic to good use by becoming a freelance lecturer.

His lectures must have been remarkable, especially the ones on literary figures. "With almost an erotic emotion, as if I were indulging myself in some kind of perverted love affair," he wrote in his *Autobiography*, "I entered the nerves of Dickens or . . . Henry James or Dostoevsky." At the same time, he never ceased to be John Cowper Powys, a high-strung, perpetually disheveled Englishman. Once, when he was getting ready to lecture, his hostess whispered to him that his fly buttons were undone. "Madam," he replied, "I wear them that way." I suspect this was true.

One reason Powys went to America was to escape the English class system, whose snobbery, restraint, atrophied manners, and cult of discretion he hated. He hated them so much, in fact, that he devised a sort of reverse class system. "The deepest emotion I have is my malice against the well-constituted as compared with the ill-constituted," he declared in his *Autobiography*, adding, "Dwarfs, morons, idiots, imbeciles, hunchbacks, degenerates, perverts, paranoiacs, neurasthenics, every type of individual upon whom the world looked down, I loved . . . admired . . . and imitated."

A word about this unusual *Autobiography*: it is a record not of Powys's achievements but of his various inadequacies. In it he described his manias and phobias, his "idiotic" mouth and "Neanderthal pate," and particularly his sexual failures. He discussed "the sickening moments of dead sea desolation that came to me from my ulcerated stomach" and his chronic constipation. He called himself a "scarecrow Don Quixote with the faint heart of Sancho." And yet the mood of the *Autobiography* is not

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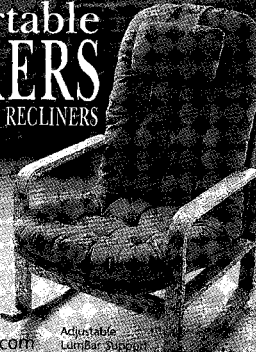
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gloomy or self-pitying. After all, this book was written by a man who treasured being "ill-constituted."

NO doubt Powys's feelings of inadequacy had something to do with his comparatively late arrival as a writer. He was forty-three when he published a collaborative memoir with his brother Llewelyn titled *Confessions of Two Brothers* (1916). Two Hardy-esque novels followed, *Rodmoor* and *Ducdame*, and then *Wolf Solent*. Each book was written primarily on trains as Powys traveled between lectures. At last, in 1930, he settled down with Phyllis Playter outside the town of Hillsdale, in New York's hardscrabble Columbia County. At age fifty-eight he began to earn his living, or what passed for a living, as a writer.

By now his ulcer had become, as he put it, "rampageous." A diet of raw eggs, milk, olive oil, and bread crusts did little to assuage it. His bowels were so out of whack that he had to have an enema every third day. But he thrived, or at least his muse thrived, and in his four years in upstate New York, Powys wrote *A Glastonbury Romance*, another novel of epic proportions titled *Weymouth Sands*, and the *Autobiography*, along with a book of idiosyncratic popular philosophy called *A Philosophy of Solitude* (sample quotation: "When you think in a seated posture, you think with your rump, not with your soul").

In 1981, while I was staying in the nearby town of Austerlitz, I visited Phudd Bottom, Powys's improbably named upstate retreat. It was not very different from dozens of other slightly ramshackle clapboard houses in the area, but just down the road I noticed a house that was different. It was surrounded by a fence on whose pickets appeared to be decapitated human heads. The owner was a retired dump-keeper who had cut off the heads of discarded plaster saints, dolls, and sculptures and impaled them on his fence as decoration. He was an elderly man, and, as it happened, he remembered Powys.

"Now there was one strange guy," he said. "Used to walk around in the snow in his bare feet. He'd say he just forgot to put his boots on. And then you'd sometimes see him banging his head on the mailbox. Strange guy."

Actually, Powys didn't bang his head so much as tap it against the mailbox, a

ritual he believed would ensure the safe delivery of a letter. He would also utter lengthy incantations while bathing, and walk exactly the same route every day, bowing to exactly the same trees and stones. One of these stones he named "the god of Phudd." Another he named Perdita. Perdita, he wrote, was "the only daughter I shall ever have"; he once felt obliged to kiss his geologic offspring nine times because his dog had peed on it (her?).

Nowadays such behavior would probably be called obsessive-compulsive and classified as a disorder. Powys didn't think of it as a disorder, however. He indulged in it, exulted in it, flourished it like a standard, and ultimately used it to his advantage as a writer. The flip side of kissing stones and tapping his head against the mailbox was an explosive talent for putting words to paper.

IN 1935 Powys moved to Wales. This was not only a physical move but also a journey into his past. Wales was the land of his distant ancestors and home to the sixth-century magician-cum-bard Taliessin, who had been a sort of role model for Powys since childhood. In fact, he sometimes called himself a "tatterdemalion Taliessin."

Powys was at heart a primitivist, for whom virtually every modern invention was anathema. In *Wolf Solent* he referred to airplanes as "spying down upon every retreat like ubiquitous vultures." He never drove a car and never used a typewriter. He thought television was pernicious. He didn't like talking on the telephone, because he didn't want his words violated by a tangle of wires. So it's not surprising that after his move to Wales he looked to the inviolate past, especially the inviolate Welsh past, for inspiration.

He was working on a novel about Owen Glendower's failed rebellion against Henry IV of England—dramatized by Shakespeare in *Henry IV, Part I*. An enormous novel (the first chapter of the manuscript was 300 pages) set in fifteenth-century Wales was not the most practical of projects for a financially strapped writer in his sixties. And he was quite strapped: when his publisher, Bodley Head, accepted the novel, *Owen Glendower*, Powys had less than £15 in the bank.

To call *Owen Glendower* and his next work of fiction, *Porius*, historical nov-

els would be a bit like calling *Moby-Dick* a sea story. The former includes scenes of rather dubious historical accuracy, including one in which Owen shares his thoughts with a merganser (the merganser reciprocates by sharing its thoughts with him). The latter starts out more or less realistically in the Edeyrnion Valley in A.D. 499, but then quickly shifts to a sort of Welsh Never-Never Land.

Porius is, I think, Powys's masterpiece. It calls to mind novels as diverse as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Finnegans Wake*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. At times it reads like an extended study of what Powys called "the three incomprehensibles": sex, religion, and nature. At other times it reads like a magical mystery extravaganza. In one chapter an owl metamorphoses into a bird-maiden; in another the hero, Prince Porius, mates with an aboriginal giantess while her father is plucking corpses off a battlefield with cannibalistic intent; in another the bard Taliessin (Powys's mouthpiece) chants verses about "The ending forever of the Guilt-sense and God-sense, / The ending forever of the Sin-sense and Shame-sense. . . ."

I can imagine the alarm in the offices of Simon & Schuster, Powys's American publisher, when the 1,589-page manuscript of the novel arrived. The author, always somewhat intemperate about book length, now seemed to have gone totally round the bend. Not surprisingly, Simon & Schuster declined to make an offer on *Porius*, as did every other American publisher. Powys's agents approached. A reader for Bodley Head insisted that the manuscript be trimmed by at least a thousand pages. At this Powys, a man normally compliant with publishers' requests, howled. He was an organ of communication for the departed spirits of the sixth century, he said, and didn't that count for something? Only Powys could have invented a ploy like this.

But it may not have been altogether a ploy—he may actually have thought that Taliessin had spoken to him, albeit from inside his own skull rather than from a distance of fourteen centuries. For he believed that his "ichthyosaurus-ego," as he called it, could draw on a store of memories dating as far back as the dawn of human experience—maybe even further. Powys was not the only one to hold this

conviction. C. G. Jung believed more or less the same thing, but without the extinct-reptile designation.

Porius was published in London by Macdonald in an abridged edition in 1951. (The complete version didn't appear in print until 1994.) Although Powys was by then close to eighty, he did not go gentle into the proverbial good night. He went eccentric into it. He would entertain visitors by acting out the stoning of Saint Stephen for them. Immediately after getting up in the morning, he would pray to a host of heathen deities, including Demeter, the Greek goddess of agriculture, and Cybele, the Phrygian goddess of nature.

And he kept putting pen to paper. Indeed, Powys's literary output in old age was so voluminous that upon learning he had died in his ninety-first year, in 1963, one is almost inclined to say "Yes, but did he stop writing?"

His last books are loopy, free-form fantasies in which anything can happen. The venerable Odysseus can travel to the lost continent of Atlantis, for instance, or Time can suddenly materialize as "an enormous black slug." In his final work, *All or Nothing*, a science-fiction story apparently written for children, someone called the King of the Milky Way wanders around the solar system with his penis slung over his shoulder. Silly stuff, perhaps—but silliness was for Powys an antidote to the numbing effects of machined logic.

Powys spent his last years as a semi-recluse, seldom leaving the obscure Welsh slate-quarrying town in which he lived. But he was not a forlorn figure. Quite the contrary. There's a certain majesty in the image of this craggy, rumped old man, foolscap tablet in his lap, writing, endlessly writing, as if the world depended on his words. He may have been a monument of neglect, but he seems not to have cared whether he was neglected or dutifully fêted. What mattered to Powys was pursuing his own bliss, and this he did right up to the end.

On my visit to 1, Waterloo Place, in Blaenau Ffestiniog, I couldn't help noticing the waterfall just behind the house. I found its noise disconcerting, even annoying, because I could barely hear my hostess's frail voice above the din of plunging water. When I mentioned the noise to her, she said, "Well, Mr. Powys found it essential . . ." ☼

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"Triangles"

1. W + EDGES 2. SEW (homophone) 3. E(C)L + AIR 4. MIST(RAN) + SLATE 5. RAT (rev.)
6. DOGLEG (hidden) 7. GO(CA + R)T 8. TEMP + ER 9. PA + ST(O)RY 10. SKATEBOARDER (anag.)
11. SATIRISTS (anag.) 12. HO(U)STS 13. O + DELET(e) 14. E(LATE)D 15. A + CHILL + E(S)HEL
16. A + GENT'S 17. CARTILAGE (anag.) 18. M(ED) + DATING 19. DETER + I + ORAT
- ED 20. R(A)IDER 21. A + L + COHO + LI + C 22. ROADIE (anag.) 23. I + TALIA 24. RED (even letters)
25. ARTIST (anag.) 26. DISC + ON + SO + LATE 27. T + A + SSEL (rev.)
28. AMTRAK (anag.) 29. MOPE(D)S 30. HOPPER (double def.) 31. AVERSE (hidden)
32. POINTLESS (double def.) 33. DR + EA + MS 34. SUP + PORTER

The (Still) Relevant Socialist

Michael Harrington, the author of The Other America, was the most charismatic figure on the American left in the past half century. His case for a democratic socialism takes on new meaning in an age of globalization

by Harold Meyerson

THE OTHER AMERICAN

The Life of Michael Harrington

by Maurice Isserman.
PublicAffairs, 449 pages, \$28.50.

FROM the mid-1950s through the late 1980s one of the high points of life on the American left was a Michael Harrington speech. For thousands of listeners, in fact, a Harrington speech marked the starting point of their own life on the left. Harrington was a more accomplished and prolific writer than either Eugene Debs or Norman Thomas, his two predecessors in the role of America's pre-eminent socialist, but like Debs and Thomas, he won the majority of his converts through the power of the spoken word.

A Harrington speech was both a tour de force and a tour de horizon—an argument, invariably, for the moral vision and practical advantages of democratic socialism, tailored to the causes and controversies of the moment, buttressed by a scholarly consideration of social trends and statistics, strengthened by Harrington's habit of entertaining opposing arguments before dispatching them. He provided listeners with something that was none too easy to find elsewhere on the left: a sense of historical context, of how their own activism fit into a larger pattern they might otherwise have trouble discerning, of where they stood, broadly speaking, in the flow of history. And he provided them with one thing more: an overwhelming sense of the moral urgency that underlay his critique of capitalism.

I was one of Harrington's converts and comrades, and during the seventies and



Illustrations by Scott Laumann

AUGUST 2000

eighties, when I worked with him, I must have heard about a hundred of his talks. I'm quoted once in Maurice Isserman's fine new biography of Harrington, *The Other American*, and that is to appraise Harrington as "the last white boy in America who could give a speech." But then, Harrington was schooled in a culture of argumentation that would be hard to replicate today. He learned rigor and logic from the Jesuits, rigor and irony from the Shachtmanites (a Socialist sect that looked to Leon Trotsky as the model rhetorician), and then leavened these influences with his affinity for poetry, his vestigial Irish lilt and midwestern twang, his Greenwich Village cosmopolitanism, his generosity of spirit, his willingness to confess doubt, his unflagging optimism, his enduring boyishness—ultimately, I suppose, his American-ness. No one else could weave Marx, Lenin, Karl Kautsky, and Willy Brandt into a talk and still sound like the boy—the brilliant boy—next door.

And there was the voice itself. Harrington once told me that an opera coach had rushed up to him after one speech to say, "You have such incredible timbre!" His close colleague Irving Howe referred to "Mike's piercing alto," and William F. Buckley Jr., who debated Harrington nearly forty times from the 1950s through the 1980s, to his "evangelist's pitch of voice."

The evangelical metaphor isn't a bad one. Harrington held out the prospect of neither certitude nor salvation in his talks, but there was always an unspoken subtext to his speeches: *If this cause is as urgent as I've demonstrated, as plausible as I've shown, and so important that I'm devoting my life to it—why, then, so should you.*

And thousands did.

IF there was a dialectic that shaped Michael Harrington's life (and he was one of few American thinkers with an instinctively dialectical cast of mind), it was that between rectitude and relevance; indeed, his struggle to synthesize the two is the overarching theme of Isserman's book. Writing in 1952 (the year Harrington first joined a socialist organization), Daniel Bell argued that the problem of American socialism was that it was of the world but not in it—a movement too concerned with its own correctness to be effective. Much of Harrington's career can be seen as a surprisingly successful attempt to prove Bell

wrong—though in a few crucial instances he proved Bell right.

This was, after all, a man who spent his early twenties in the sublime purity and ridiculous isolation of the Catholic Worker, Dorothy Day's radical lay order, which succored the poor in New York's Bowery; who moved on to the Shachtmanites at the height of McCarthyism; and who then managed, while traveling around the country on socialism's behalf, to inspire and build up many of the small groups that would coalesce in the sixties left. This was the man who "discovered" poverty in the affluent America of the early sixties, whom the mainstream media acclaimed as a national conscience, and who suffered a nervous breakdown that he would partly attribute to all that establishment approval. Harrington was the elder most trusted by the students who led the New Left; he repudiated them for their ideological deviations and was thus unable to steer them in a less self-destructive direction. In the seventies he was the guy who picked up the pieces from the wreckage of the sixties, the champion of coalition, who connected or reconnected the peace activists, the feminists, and the middle-class reform Democrats with one another and with the more progressive portions of the labor movement. Finally, in the eighties, with social democracy and the welfare state under attack and with laissez-faire on the rise, Harrington fought defensive battles alongside the rest of liberal America, but also assumed a more prophetic role, sketching a socialism for a future that he acknowledged was distant if not eternally hypothetical. In Bell's parlance, Harrington spent his last years (he died of esophageal cancer in 1989, at age sixty-one) both in the world and of it—but the world, as he himself repeatedly acknowledged, was moving away from him.

The young man we first meet in Isserman's book, however, was both blissfully in the world and out of it. Harrington, who was born and raised in St. Louis, was at once a shy poet and a gregarious, popular kid in high school—the classroom wit, an editor of the school paper and yearbook. (Asked by a friend at his elite Catholic school why he seldom washed his face, Harrington answered, "Poets don't"—as good an expression of a fourteen-year-old's impression of the poetic life as one could ever hope to find.) At twenty-two—having whizzed through Holy Cross, aced his first year at Yale Law, and spent the fol-

lowing year in the graduate English program at the University of Chicago—he suddenly dropped out. He joined the Catholic Worker and showed up for such deeds of moral witness as the minuscule demonstrations against the Korean War. Nor was his abrupt affiliation the act of a convinced Catholic: only by reading Kierkegaard on the absurdity of belief and the leap of faith did Harrington argue himself back to a fragile theistic position. Plainly, he was drawn less to God than to the life of a saint.

Dorothy Day may be up for canonization today, but before she joined the Church, she led the life of a New York bohemian, cavorting and consorting with half the radicals and artists in Greenwich Village. That was all decades behind her by the time Harrington came to the Worker, but the two kinds of lives that Day had led sequentially, he led simultaneously. Days he spent in the Bowery, engaged not so much in tending to the local derelicts as in writing essays and critiques for the order's paper. Evenings he spent at the White Horse Tavern, where the latter-day counterparts of Day's artists and radicals met to talk, drink, and pair off for the night. He had no trouble reconciling his days and nights, but in time his leap of faith came up short. In 1952 he shifted from a spiritual sect to a secular, socialist one.

From his education in Catholic schools, as Isserman makes clear, Harrington had imbibed the Church's antipathy to capitalism. It would be a mistake, however, to ascribe his socialism to a delayed-action epiphany about, say, *Rerum Novarum* or any other Catholic anti-capitalist teachings. What Harrington did retain from his years as a believer was—well, his belief in belief. Although his various faiths always encompassed a strong dose of skepticism, a common theme runs through Harrington's Catholicism, aestheticism, bohemianism, and socialism, which he sounded in his 1983 book on religion, *The Politics at God's Funeral*. Genuinely committed "believers and unbelievers," he wrote, "have the same enemy: the humdrum nihilism of everyday life in much of Western society." Henceforth the war on humdrum nihilism would be waged on socialism's behalf.

In place of Dorothy Day, Harrington soon acquired, in Max Shachtman, an equally exotic mentor. Shachtman had been an aide and assistant to Trotsky himself, but in 1940, shortly before Trotsky's

murder, he broke with the Old Man on the question of whether Stalinist Russia was socialist at all. Anyone who doesn't believe that impotence tends to corrupt, and that absolute impotence corrupts absolutely, hasn't studied the history of Trotskyism and post-Trotskyism in America. The various groups and subtendencies split again and again, like amoebas. Life within the Shachtmanites was an unending series of sharp attacks not just on the few remaining Stalinists but also on fellow members who were straying from the line. As Isserman demonstrates, Harrington was an accomplished factionalist both inside and outside the organization. (He led the Shachtmanites' youth group, for instance, in factionalizing and ultimately paralyzing the student affiliate of Americans for Democratic Action.)

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, however, the Shachtmanites, who never numbered more than a few hundred, became less and less of a sect—partly owing, in the latter years, to Harrington's prodding. They ceased pretending that they were in some sense a revolutionary organization and espoused instead a democratic socialism, merging in the late 1950s into Norman Thomas's Socialist Party and eventually reconciling themselves to the fact that in America it made sense for socialists to work within the Democratic Party.

And no Shachtmanite was more in America than Harrington. As the staffer for the youth groups of the Shachtmanites and then the Socialist Party, he toured campuses throughout the middle and late fifties, denouncing U.S. foreign policy, championing civil rights, ridiculing the House Un-American Activities Committee; recruiting an activist here, starting a chapter there; at every stop balancing a talk on politics with another talk on culture; finding a girl on every campus; riding the bus and bumming rides all across the nation—leading, in short, an impossibly romantic life. Marginality had nothing to offer that compared to this: the socialist met America, and it was good.

And increasingly the students responded. Harrington's audiences grew larger with each passing year. Leading sixties movement figures like Stokely Carmichael and Jerry Rubin were drawn to the Socialists, and Tom Hayden called Harrington "easily the most charismatic of the political intellectuals" he'd met during those years. The Pied Piper for the young people who were to lead the New Left, Harrington

began to foresee its configurations. The new progressives, he wrote, would be a coalition of labor, the dispossessed, students, and beats, bonded by a moral solidarity of the kind he evoked (this he did not write) in his talks. This was far from the narrowly Marxist language of Shachtman, closer to the moral-tribune tradition of Debs and Thomas—though Harrington's talks had just enough Village hipness to make socialism cool as well as urgent.

From the late fifties on, an increasing number of Harrington's speeches dealt with the widespread poverty that persisted in a nation busy congratulating itself for creating the world's first majority middle class. Harrington wrote two major pieces on the subject in *Commentary*—scrutinizing the numbers, uncovering as many as 50 million Americans who lived in poverty, and describing the ways in which poverty creates its own culture of disorganization and dysfunction. He received several offers from publishing houses to expand his articles into a book, but Shachtman—the ultimate organization man—told him that it was more important to tend to party business. Fortunately, Macmillan made Harrington an offer so generous that he at last couldn't refuse it.

THE *Other America* (1962) wasn't recognized as an instant classic, though it received very favorable reviews. Not until Dwight Macdonald wrote a fifty-page essay in *The New Yorker* extolling both the book and its author did it become a phenomenon. Harrington was spending a year in Europe when the review appeared; he returned to the United States to find the paperback a best seller, a must-read on campuses—and in the White House. Lyndon Johnson had become President just a few weeks before Harrington's return; told that John F. Kennedy had planned to launch a war on poverty, Johnson ordered a full-tilt assault. Harrington was summoned to Washington to work on the new program, which did not begin to approximate what he thought was necessary.

Publication of *The Other America* transformed Harrington's life. Network television sought him out as a commentator on social policy, and speaking invitations poured in from all across the nation. All the while his role in the American left—and in American liberalism—had become even more pivotal. In 1964 James Wechsler, the editor of the *New York Post*, wrote that Harrington was the man

who would bring unity to the "scattered legions among the liberal intellectual community, the civil rights activists and the more enlightened sectors of organized labor." Wechsler didn't include antiwar activists on his list, because Vietnam didn't heat up until the following year, but here, too, Harrington was recognized as central to bringing, if not unity, at least comity between the old anti-Communist left he came from and the new antiwar student left he'd helped spawn. "Harrington was pivotal," Todd Gitlin wrote years later, in his history of the sixties, "for he was the one person who might have mediated across the generational divide."

But he didn't.

IN the histories of the twentieth-century American left much has been made of the blow-up between Old Left and New, between Harrington and Tom Hayden, at the 1962 Port Huron conference of Students for a Democratic Society—the student affiliate of the League for Industrial Democracy, on whose board Harrington sat and of which he would become chairman two years later. Harrington was one of four LID elders—all Shachtmanites—who came to Port Huron as ideological chaperones, and he arrived armed with criticisms of the first draft of the conference statement, which Hayden had written. The draft, Harrington said, was insufficiently critical of communism and insufficiently appreciative of labor and liberal groups. But it wasn't so much what Harrington said as the way he said it that stunned his young acolytes; he ripped into Hayden the way Shachtmanites had always ripped into their rival factions, or into the dread Stalinist opposition. There was no Stalinist opposition at Port Huron, but the sense of embattlement that animated the true Shachtmanite had mysteriously resurfaced in Harrington. As Isserman puts it, "He had once again strapped on the armor of the doomed legion of the Left."

In fact, as Harrington later acknowledged, the SDSers took most of his criticisms to heart after he left and revised their draft. That is not how events were reported to him, however, by Tom Kahn and Rochelle Horowitz, two steely Shachtmanites who stayed behind. Without so much as reading the revision, the LID board ordered the locks changed on the offices of the errant student activists.

Isserman makes clear, however, that

the Port Huron brouhaha didn't really occasion the rift between the Old Left and the New. Harrington soon read the draft, apologized for overreacting, and started touring campuses to bigger audiences than ever. Two years later *The Other America* was all but required reading for the student activists who traveled to Mississippi to take part in Freedom Summer.

In mid-1965 Harrington was writing columns not only against the Vietnam War (he had long opposed the U.S. government's decision to intervene in Vietnam) but also in favor of student demonstrators. As Isserman shows, however, Harrington subordinated his opposition to the war to the increasingly faux opposition of his fellow Shachtmanites, who were forever proclaiming the emergence of a "third force" in South Vietnam—independent unions and the like, when in fact there were none. He steered clear of most of the antiwar activity of the time. In 1968 Harrington did campaign for Bobby Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy, and helped to found the New Democratic Coalition to promote the influence of the antiwar forces in Democratic Party affairs. Such positions were anathema to the Shachtmanites, who by then had reduced socialism to a doctrinal expression of George Meany's biases. Not until 1972, however, confronted with a Shachtman-dominated executive committee that shared Meany's loathing of George McGovern—did Harrington quit the Socialist Party. In the end, leaving proved less an act of apostasy than staying.

WHEN he founded the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, commonly known as DSOC, in 1973, Harrington finally had an organization that genuinely sought to build a progressive coalition—and not a moment too soon. The American liberal community was all but shattered by the time the Vietnam War ended: labor was disdainful of middle-class liberals, middle-class liberals were scornful of labor ("They're not worth the powder it would take to blow them up," one McGovern aide famously pronounced), and the no-longer-quite-so-youthful protesters of the sixties were dismissive of both.

For the next decade Harrington preached the gospel of interdependency, telling McGovern liberals, labor-union members, minority activists, environmentalists, feminists, and simmered-down

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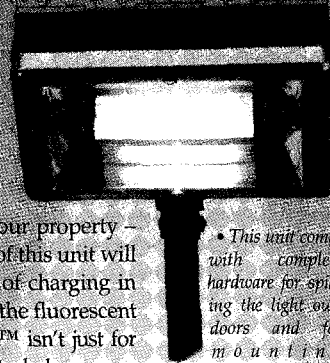
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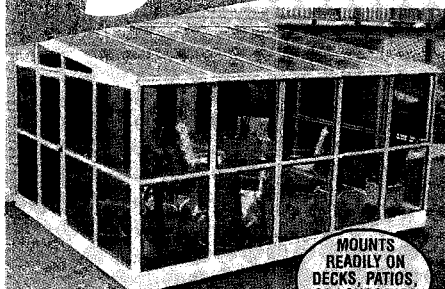
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sixties kids that none of them could prevail by themselves. He put forth a program that could bring them together: planned full employment, creating a climate of economic security, in which environmental safeguards and policies of racial and cultural liberalism would be less threatening to white workers and thus more likely to be enacted. With the backing of the United Auto Workers and other progressive unions, he assembled Democratic Agenda, a coalition that advanced these perspectives in the Democratic Party platform wars of the 1970s and early 1980s.

Harrington's speaking schedule grew even more crowded during these years, and once at the podium, he never confined himself merely to outlining a new course for the Democrats. A typical Harrington speech of that time might contain refutations of the latest claims of Charles Murray, an exhortation to reject the centrist inertia of the Carter Administration, a progressive program for full employment, and a sketch of the growing corporate control of the planet and how socialism was the only democratic alternative to that control. It was always necessary to define what democratic socialism was not—not Communist tyranny, not post-office inefficiency, not nationalization of enterprises, not even unswerving antagonism to markets. Harrington's socialism was about the participatory control of workplaces, the democratic control of technologies and investment. It was about the necessity of the social—a *cri de coeur* against a growing individualism that denied the very interdependency of humankind. "Anti-social socialization," as he put it, was very much the order of the day.

Harrington neither entertained nor imparted any illusions that history was running his way. Indeed, the weight of history, of socialist failure, hung heavier on him than it had on Debs and Thomas, and he felt compelled to offer both a vision and a plan even as he was updating and revising them, so to speak, on the run. The same Pascalian cast, the same leap of faith, that had propelled his commitment to the Catholic Worker now sustained his faith—not in socialism's necessity or its moral worth but in the prospect of its realization.

Throughout the eighties Harrington insisted on incorporating a transnational dimension into his speeches—though not even this spellbinding speaker could hold

an audience's attention as he plumbed the Law of the Sea. Virtually no one listened to his talks to learn about the solidaristic wage policies of Sweden, Isserman writes.

They listened to him because he had come to serve as the voice of collective conscience for those who were disturbed by the values of Reagan's America. He told the nation uncomfortable truths in a way that made people want to do something about them.

Like Debs and Thomas before him, Harrington finished his career above all in the role of moral tribune. As to the relevance of his socialism to both the present and the future, Isserman remains discreetly, strategically, mum.

BUT this is not a book that concludes with the end of Isserman's text. It is, in fact, the only book I can recall whose back-cover blurb provides the clearest view of the end of the story—of Harrington's legacy. The blurb praises the book but mainly praises Harrington—"a man whose entire life was devoted to the cause of social justice, from his early days at the Catholic Worker to his support for workers' struggles in the 1980s." The quotation is from the AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney.

There are any number of ways to look at Sweeney's successful 1995 campaign to unseat Lane Kirkland, but one absolutely valid interpretation is that it marked the victory of the Harrington wing of American labor over the Shachtmanite wing—and not just because Sweeney was a member of DSA while Kirkland was the chief sponsor of Social Democrats USA, as the Shachtmanites had come to be known. Consider the bill of indictment that Sweeney's supporters brought against Kirkland: He remained preoccupied with the concerns of the Cold War years after the Cold War had ended. He opposed, straight through the debacle of the 1994 election, labor's entering into coalitions with community, civil-rights, and other groups it could not control.

More important, consider what American labor has become under Sweeney's leadership. It has redefined itself as a social movement, the linchpin of a larger coalition, devoted to organizing the working poor. It has reached out to campuses as never before, recruiting all manner of unkempt kids as organizers, backing the

college anti-sweatshop movement. It has forged nearly unimaginable coalitions—the teamsters and the turtles together at last—in opposition to global finance and corporations. And it has staked out a position on this new world order that makes it, more than any other union movement or political party on the planet, the pre-eminent champion of global social democracy.

It is, in short, the institutional embodiment of the things for which Michael Harrington stood and spoke and lived. In good measure that's because the people who heard Harrington's speeches—and changed their lives—are now the political directors and policy wonks and organizing capos and presidents of any number of American unions, at the local, regional, and national levels. Maybe they heard him explain to auto workers—first skeptical, then cheering—at their 1983 national convention, held in the middle of a wave of plant closings, that their enemies weren't Mexican workers but the corporations that played them off against each other. Perhaps Harrington argued with today's leaders at the end of the sixties that unions were still the indispensable force for change, and that there were a number—a small number—of unions that would welcome their involvement. Most likely they heard him sketch his vision of a world no longer dominated by the calculus of the market, which had crossed over from necessity to freedom, and they wanted nothing more than to join him in hastening that day.

At the conclusion of *Part of Our Time* (1955), Murray Kempton's lyrical history of the thirties, Kempton tried to assess the legacy of that generation's great socialist—and it is, he argued, the ongoing work of the people he calls "Norman Thomas's children." "The labor movement is full of them," Kempton wrote, "not merely the Reuther boys but a host of [officials]." More of Thomas's onetime acolytes, Kempton continued, "remain from the youth movement of the thirties, functioning in a fashion doing least violence to their image of themselves in those days, than survive from any other political group." The same, I'd argue, can be said of the children of Michael Harrington, who have transformed the labor movement over the past few years into the nation's most dynamic and important force for progressive change.

THERE'S one other part of Harrington's legacy, the significance of which is only now becoming clear. It's what Harrington said in those slower stretches of his talks, and what he wrote in the largely unread portions of his books during the last decade of his life. It's his guide for the forces that have only now begun the work of creating a social and political global order to balance the purely economic—that is, capitalist—one that has arisen in the past quarter century. "The third creation of the world," Harrington called the ascendance of this corporate order in his final book: a new construction of the global order, much like that undertaken by the British in the nineteenth century and by the Americans in the middle of the twentieth. A specific historical achievement, no more immutable than the national laissez-faire regimes of a hundred years ago.

I was reminded of Harrington's late writings recently, while reading a proposal by Jane D'Arista, a brilliant economist with the Financial Markets Center. D'Arista has proposed a global equivalent of the Federal Reserve—controlled by a board drawn equally from the world's wealthiest and most populous nations—as a safeguard against destabilizing capital flows, and more generally against the ability of financial markets to unravel a na-

tion's economy. The United States would have its say, but so would India and Brazil.

This rang a faint bell, and sure enough, in Harrington's *Socialism: Past and Future*, the book he wrote in 1988 as he was dying, Harrington proposed an Economic Security Council with some of the same powers and governed by essentially the same structure. He was considering the practicalities of the first steps toward a democratic global order. And he was considering how to link such practicalities to a new, globalized version of the kind of passion and faith that had sustained socialists throughout their work to create democracies, both political and social, on the national level. He wrote,

The politics of international economic and social solidarity must be presented as a practical solution to immediate problems as well as a recognition of that oneness of humankind celebrated in the Biblical account of the common parents of all human beings.

The task of the socialist, Irving Howe said, is simultaneously to see and work on both the near and the far. That's something the movement that burst forth at the World Trade Organization protest in Seattle last fall has yet to learn from the thought and example of Michael Harrington, who is in and of the world even now. ☼

fog. Photographers usually counted as war correspondents. The artists served with the military. The human eye, and hand, and sensibility, give their record impressive power.

The Settlement of the Americas

by Thomas D. Dillehay.

Basic, 392 pages, \$27.50.

Mr. Dillehay is campaigning against what he calls the Clovis model, the widely accepted theory that the Americas were first populated by nomadic hunters who used stone weapons of distinctive design, known as Clovis points. These big-game hunters supposedly advanced from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego in roughly 500 years, exterminating wildlife all the way. Clovis proponents have dominated North American archaeological circles for years. Meanwhile, South American archaeologists have examined a number of sites yielding earlier dates, different tools, and suggestions of as much gathering as hunting. A case of this type requires evidence. Mr. Dillehay provides it, moving soberly from dig to dig, enumerating non-Clovis discoveries. His style is utilitarian, suggesting the scraped-bare landscape of an archaeological excavation. There are few illustrations. This is a work designed for readers seriously interested in the question of who got here first.

The Vanishing American Outhouse

by Ronald S. Barlow.

Viking Studio, 142 pages, \$19.95.

The outhouse, backhouse, privy, loo, with similar titles ad infinitum, was once ubiquitous, there being no substitute for it. It deserves commemoration. Mr. Barlow has collected photographs of elegant historical examples (a circular brick structure, meant to be bear-proof) and decaying shanties. He includes plans for the "sanitary privies" that were instituted by FDR in the hope of improving rural conditions during the Depression, bits of poetry (suitably bad), and old postcards (suitably simple-minded). There is considerable information about the actor Chic Sale and his best-selling small book *The Specialist*. Outhouses are a subject with serious roots which no one is obliged to take seriously. Mr. Barlow's tribute is properly flippant.

BRIEF REVIEWS



They Drew Fire: Combat Artists of World War II

by Brian Lanker and Nicole Newnham.

TV Books/HarperCollins,

192 pages, \$39.95.

There was so much photographic coverage of World War II, and it was so promptly and efficiently distributed, that combat artists received little attention. But they were there, many of them, maintained by all the service branches.

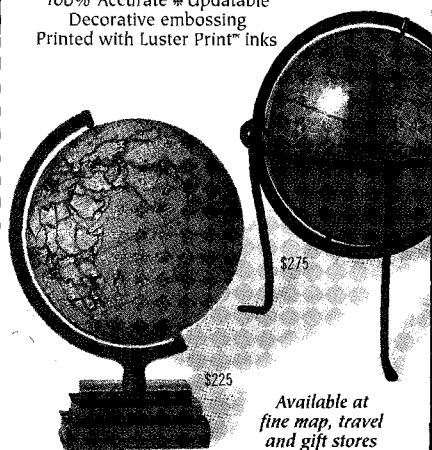
They did good work, and the authorities had their pick of it. Most of it, therefore, lurks in official hands, carefully preserved but not offered to the public. This book is a revelation. It includes interviews with artists still living, several of whom were much surprised that anyone should be taking an interest in what they did so long ago. There were no rules for the artists, no prohibitions, no demands for prettification. Subject matter ranged from card games to piles of corpses, and technique from grim realism to stylized

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Light House

by William Monahan.
Riverhead, 223 pages,
\$21.95.

By accident, Mr. Monahan's rattle-witted hero gets his hands on a mass of cash and runs off with it. He takes refuge in a decrepit inn somewhere in Massachusetts, with the owners of the money in pursuit. The out-of-service lighthouse offshore shelters a hermit. The inn's landlords are a limp-spined would-be intellectual and his permanently enraged wife. There is a professional literary adviser on the premises, along with one of his followers, a paranoid Grub Street hack. All these characters are more or less loony, and so is the action, which occurs in the midst of a horrendous northeaster. There is not a quiet moment in this slapstick satire—or a plausible one, either.

And Quiet Flows the Vodka, or When Pushkin Comes to Shove

by Alicia Chudo,
edited by Andrew Sobesednikov.
Northwestern, 232 pages,
\$14.95.

Only a true lover, and most learned follower, of Russian literature could give it such a wallop in parody and paraphrase as Professor Chudo does. Her footnotes are a problem, though. Some of them may be genuine.

Black Mass

by Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill.
PublicAffairs, 304 pages,
\$26.00.

The authors are well-respected Boston journalists. They have spent years covering the Whitey Bulger story, an extravagant case of misconduct by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and associated corruption. Bulger is now on the Ten Most Wanted List. His FBI protector is in the toils of the law. Investigation is belatedly sorting out the pattern of racketeering, drug dealing, arms smuggling, and murder that Whitey conducted unmolested. The story is complicated. The authors have done a fine job of elucidation. The text ends with a question: "Where's Whitey?" There seems to be no suspicion that Whitey is dead—although quite a number of people must wish he were.

Colter

by Rick Bass.
Houghton Mifflin, 197 pages,
\$22.00.

Mr. Bass loves beautiful country, and weather (preferably autumn), and bird hunting (although, or perhaps because, he is a bad shot), and the energy and grace of bird dogs. He describes his pleasure in the field in loving detail. His story of Colter, "the best dog I ever had," ends as such tributes have for more than 2,000 years. "He went into the dark; / Along those roads we cannot hear him bark."

Weeds

by Howard Bjornson.
Chronicle Books, 70 pages,
\$19.95.

Most of the weeds that Mr. Bjornson has photographed were found fairly close to his studio in Chicago, so not everyone's favorite nuisance may be represented. Those that are, extracted from their common tangled habitat, have been converted to distinctive beauty by the photographer's eye and lens.

The Name of the World

by Denis Johnson.
HarperCollins, 129 pages,
\$22.00.

Mr. Johnson's narrator is a middle-aged professor whose grief over the deaths of his wife and daughter has reduced him to a life of mere academic duty and social paralysis. His story of how he is jolted out of his rut is well told and arouses sympathy, but one is left with the impression that his life after his recovery would make a better tale.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams

Recent books by Atlantic authors:

Engines of Tomorrow: How the World's Best Companies Are Using Their Research Labs to Win the Future by Robert Buder. Simon & Schuster, 446 pages, \$27.50. A portion of this book grew out of "The Virus Wars," in the April, 1999, Atlantic.

Drowning Ruth by Christina Schwarz. Doubleday, 400 pages, \$23.95. The novelist Christina Schwarz contributes regularly to The Atlantic.



THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Partners

Sixteen of this puzzle's clue answers are to be paired up, in each case with one extra linking letter between them, for entry in the grid as eight new words. The locations of these eight partnerships must be deduced with the help of the remaining entries, which should be entered normally. If there were heavy bars to show where entries begin and end, they would not be symmetrically located. Clues for the Partners are given in mixed order. By entering each pair's linking letter on the blank preceding the clue for its *second* portion and then reading downward, you'll see what holds the partnerships together. Clue answers include three capitalized words and one foreign word. One of the newly formed partnerships is capitalized, and the answer to clue **i** is a variant spelling.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 91.

1	2	3			4	5		6		7
8				9						
10						11				
12						13	14			
				15						16
17		18						19		
	20				21	22				
23								24		

Partners

- a.** Travel time made by my partners and me (4)
- b.** Regard heartless nuclear group (4)
- c.** "Come down." guide said (4)
- d.** Call shady group of associates (4)
- e.** Salt nudges handholds on a ship's steering wheel (6)
- f.** Maintaining velocity, stop fall (4)
- g.** Studiously read opening (4)
- h.** Play the odds, taking second in defeat (4)
- i.** Puts in order for beers, keeping trendy (6)
- j.** Something readable in fiction a captain put back (4)
- k.** Trash includes large design (4)
- l.** Victory by general's military division (4)
- m.** Number is in reach for fellow (4)
- n.** Votes against fools (4)
- o.** Style anything but retro (3)
- p.** Carol's crime: coming at the end (4)

Across

- 8.** About eight percent of us left before Dawn (4)
- 9.** Choose a bass for auditioning instrument (7)
- 10.** Point out succeeding bagel choice (6)
- 11.** Auto manufacturer had no convertible (5)
- 12.** Bishop and American playwright are excessive consumers? (5)
- 14.** Preserve in salsa verde (4)
- 15.** Make a mess of southern comedian's speech (7)
- 17.** Insect continued passing (4)
- 20.** Natural disaster of old reviewed (5)
- 22.** Measure the amount of gold in spur from the east (5)
- 23.** Word of praise for medley of Sha Na Na, mostly about love (7)
- 24.** Gets the Stones out of theater areas (4)

Down

- 1.** Head of family cut turkey (4)
- 2.** Copy plastic ear clip (7)
- 3.** Scientific study of whale adopted by child (6)
- 4.** Tiny pet snarled in old picture (7)
- 5.** Spanish number among hypochondriacs (4)
- 6.** *Self* running article about one old Greek colony (5)
- 7.** Attack someone taking the blame for others (2,2)
- 12.** Network withdrawing "Desire and Charm" (7)
- 13.** Bunch of criminals brought back trouble for nerve centers (7)
- 16.** Monkey rushes about (6)
- 18.** Drinks loudly, dispensing with pint, and speaks drunkenly (5)
- 19.** Sport gastrointestinal parasites (5)
- 21.** Blasted lawyer and nurse (4)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

WORD WATCH

by Anne H. Soukhanov

parasite single *noun*, a young Japanese woman, typically in her twenties, who lives with her parents rent-free so as to have her entire salary for spending money: "Happily unmarried, living with her parents while working as a bank teller, she is what people here call a 'parasite single'" (*The Washington Post*).

BACKGROUND: *Parasite single* was coined by Masahiro Yamada, a sociologist at Tokyo Gakugei University, in 1997. It is reminiscent of the term *boomerang baby*, discussed in this space in January of 1989, and used to describe an adult in the United States who returns to his or her parents' home to live. Unlike *boomerang babies*, most *parasite singles* have always lived with their parents, even during college, because Japanese university housing is scarce. *Parasite singles* may spend their money on expensive jewelry and cars. They dine out regularly in groups and often travel abroad together, taking advantage of special group rates for women. According to many observers, *parasite singles* are not opposed to getting married; they simply want to enjoy their freedom as long as possible.

skatertizer *noun*, an in-line skater hired to wear a lightweight flat-screen television mon-

A selection of terms that have newly been coined, that have recently acquired new currency, or that have taken on new meanings, compiled by the U.S. general editor of The Encarta World English Dictionary (1999).

itor around his or her neck, in order to display videotaped or live ads: "The in-line skaters . . . earn \$30 to \$40 an hour, depending on the day of the week and the time of day the individual 'skatertizer' works" (*The Washington Post*).

BACKGROUND: This word was coined in 1994 by Laurance Rassin, the founder and creative director of a Bethesda, Maryland, advertising firm; initially it referred to skaters wearing T-shirts printed with ads. TV-bearing *skatertizers* made their debut last year. *Skatertizers* may be hired to roam the vicinity of a theater, a store, or a trade show. Companies that have advertised by means of *skatertizers* include America Online, Disney, and Oldsmobile.

viral marketing *noun*, a promotional strategy that relies on having customers spread the word about a product, especially in conversation or by e-mail. Also called *contagion marketing*, *inertia marketing*, *multi-connected marketing*, *propagation marketing*, *stealth marketing*. "One of the cheapest and most effective Internet mar-

keting schemes ever, *viral marketing* allows even the motliest start-ups to gain a worldwide audience" (*Newsweek*).

BACKGROUND: *Viral marketing* goes back at least to a 1989 article in the trade journal *PC User*. However, it began to gain currency only after appearing three years ago in an article in the business magazine *Fast Company*. The introduction of the term to a general business readership just when e-commerce was on the verge of a huge expansion clearly helped to stimulate its widespread use. *Viral marketing* can consist of short advertising messages automatically appended to users' e-mails by their servers; recipients of such messages may regard them as product endorsements. *Viral marketers* may pay consumers nominal commissions for directing their friends to particular Web sites. *Viral marketing* can also boost a product indirectly, by spreading information harmful to the competition, a practice described last spring in an article in *Regardie's Power*: "In [some] instances [crisis-management expert Eric] Dezenhall claims

clients have been victims of attackers who are actually fronts for business competitors. 'The Nixon White House referred to it as [expletive deleted],' he says, 'but a nicer term is *viral marketing*. You simply introduce a terrifying allegation . . . and let it migrate up the mainstream media.'"

weather tourist *noun*, an aficionado of violent storms who plans vacations to areas often afflicted by them, in the hope of experiencing a storm firsthand: "[He] is a *weather tourist*, an odd but growing breed that plans its holidays around spectacularly awful weather" (*The New York Times Magazine*).

BACKGROUND: *Tornado chasing*, one form of *weather tourism*, has become particularly popular of late, no doubt owing in part to the 1996 film *Twister*. One *tornado-chasing* tour company, for example, offers two-week, \$2,000 packages. The less adventurous can indulge in armchair *storm watching*, facilitated at one West Coast inn by the placement of microphones on a nearby stormy beach: speakers enable patrons to hear the crash of thirty-foot waves and the howl of 80 mph winds from the safety of the inn's dining room. Perhaps not surprisingly, *weather tourists* tend to be city dwellers.

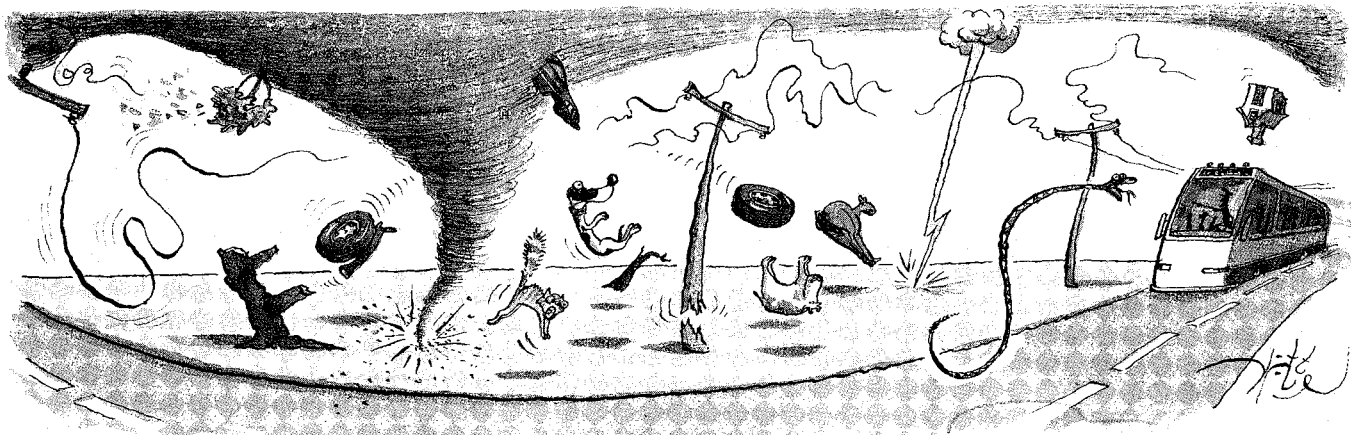


Illustration by Michael C. Witte

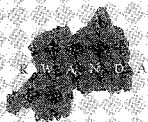
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